

# Alternate Routes

A Journal of Critical Social Research  
Volume 13, 1996

## ARTICLES

Creative and Cultural Expression but not Art:  
Multiculturalism Arts Funding as Cultural Management  
*Sheryl N. Hamilton*

Property Rights and Communication  
*Andrew Reddick*

Language, Power, and Politics:  
Revisiting the Symbolic Challenge of Movements  
*Dominique Masson*

## WORK-IN-PROGRESS

Homophobia in/as Education  
*Oscar Wolfman*

The Smokey Bear Performance Rules  
*Joseph M. Hermer*

ARCHIVE



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## A Journal of Critical Social Research

### PRESENTATION AND EDITORIAL POLICY

Alternate Routes is a refereed multi-disciplinary journal published annually by graduate students in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. Our mandate is to make Alternate Routes a forum for debate and exchange among graduate students throughout the country and beyond. We are therefore interested in receiving papers written by graduate students (or co-authored with faculty), regardless of their university affiliation.

The editorial emphasis is on the publication of critical and provocative analyses of theoretical and substantive issues which clearly have relevance for progressive political intervention. Although we welcome papers on a broad range of topics, members of the editorial board work within a feminist and marxist tradition. Therefore, we encourage submissions which advance or challenge questions and contemporary issues raised by these two broadly defined perspectives. We also welcome commentaries and reviews of recent publications.

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The editors gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance of the Carleton University community: the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and its chairperson, Flo Andrews; the Dean of Social Science, Tom Wilkinson; the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, J.W. ApSimon. We also wish to thank all the anonymous reviewers.

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# *Call For Student Papers*

*Alternate Routes* is seeking submissions for Volume 14, 1997. The editorial collective is interested in papers that address current theoretical and substantive issues within the social sciences. Manuscripts will be anonymously reviewed by faculty members from academic institutions across the country. Please use the American Psychological Association (APA) referencing system and keep endnotes to a minimum. Papers should be submitted double-spaced and in triplicate. Floppy disks formatted in WordPerfect or Microsoft Word are required for papers accepted for publication.

We also welcome responses to recent publications, book reviews and discussions of work in progress.

Responses to this invitation to contribute should be postmarked no later than **February 30, 1997**.

*Alternate Routes* est à la recherche d'articles pour son numéro de 1997. Nous sollicitons des articles théoriques et/ou empiriques, d'origines disciplinaires variées et portant sur des sujets d'actualité en sciences sociales. Les manuscrits seront évalués de façon anonyme par des membres du corps professoral de diverses universités Canadiennes. Les textes présentés doivent se conformer au système de référence de l'Association Américaine de Psychologie (APA). Veuillez soumettre trois copies de votre manuscrit (à double-interligne) et limiter le nombre de notes au minimum. La version finale du manuscrit devra nous parvenir sur disque en version Wordperfect 5.1 ou MicroSoft Word.

Nous publions aussi des notes de recherche et des recensions.

Les réponses à cet appel d'articles devraient être postées au plus tard le **30 Février 1997** (le cachet de la poste en faisant foi).

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# ALTERNATE ROUTES

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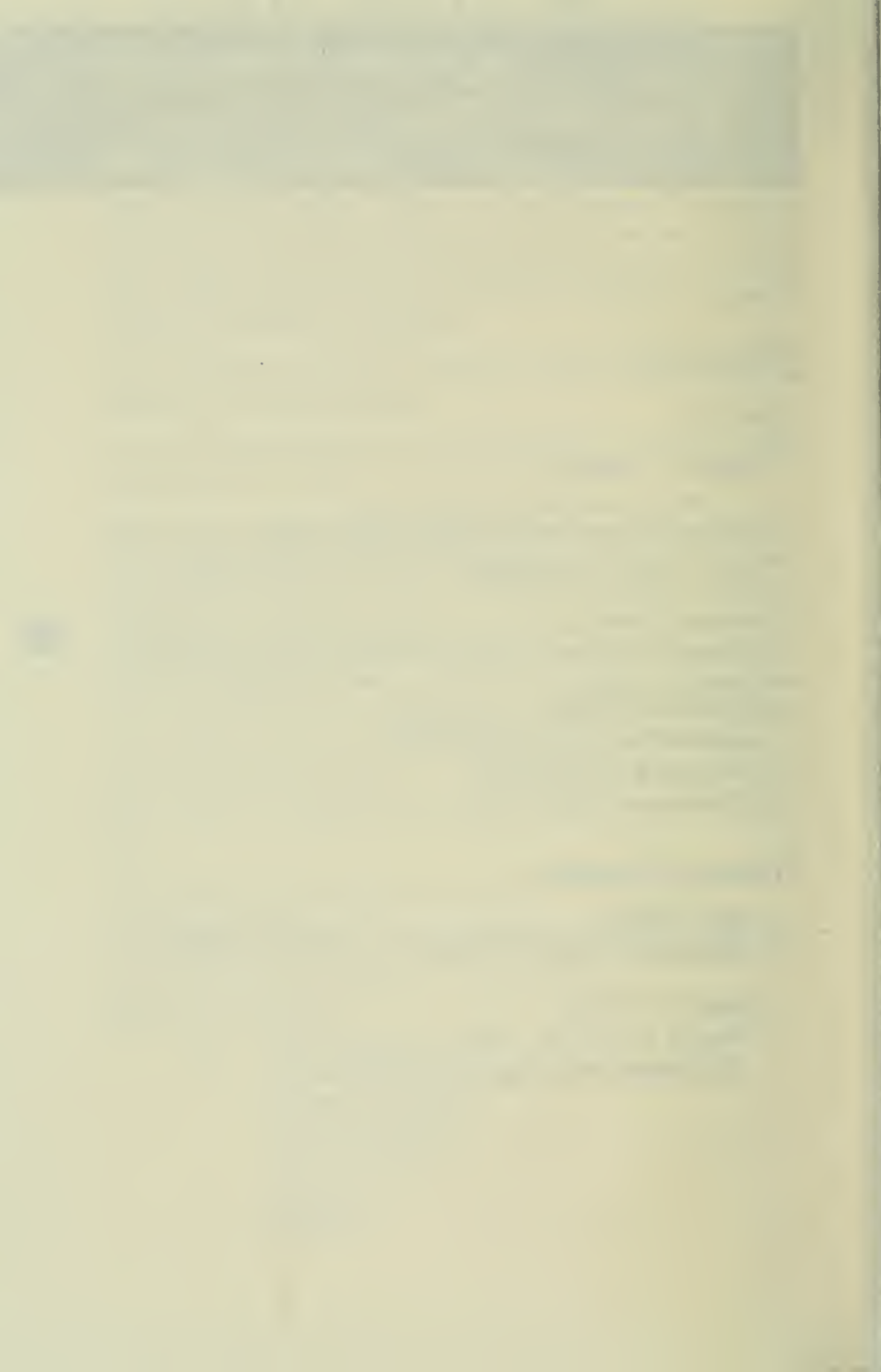
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Four years to the next millenium and “deficit reduction” has become the buzzword at all levels of governance, from national and multinational fora to municipalities and universities. The overwhelming prevalence and apparent acceptance of these priorities reduce the space for critical analyses. *Alternate Routes* resolutely remains a support of the shrinking realm of thought which reaches beyond the over-arching neo-liberal paradigm. We do so, in part, by making room for analyses which call attention to, and contest the prevailing winds of policies which seem determined to strip our social and civil networks of theirs sociality and their civility.

The articles in Volume 13 of *Alternate Routes* reveal the prevalence of discourse and social construction in the designation of everything from new forms of property to individual and collective selves as late capitalism discloses its active cultural role. As Dorothy Smith says, the current concern with discourse, communication, and designation does not come from nowhere - it is consonant with the great upswelling of mediated communication telling us always what and why we are.

Sheryl N. Hamilton examines how state policies on art and multiculturalism constitute and manage Canada's ‘high’ symbolic order. She suggests that the art supported by multiculturalism programs is not so much about artistic creativity *per se* as much as it is about managing the display, or spectacle, of a particular construction of ‘Canada’s ethnic diversity.’

Andrew Reddick’s article unveils the interests and the privatization and commodification behind the euphorically touted achievement of the “Information Superhighway.” The author argues for the need to contest privatization and press democratic access and intervention before the highway becomes a prohibitively expensive toll road for the few.

Dominique Masson’s essay on the symbolic dimension of social movements suggests that there is a need to develop a more adequate understanding both of the processes by which collective

actors construct a shared horizon of meaning and of the role that shared symbolic resources play in facilitating and legitimating action.

Finally, the last two pieces are drawn from a work-in-progress seminar held at Carleton University in the fall of 1995. Oscar Wolfman focuses on homophobia as expressed or experienced within the Ontario highschool system. His research demonstrates that even though policy statements provide official recognition of diversity, homophobia is reproduced in a number of ways including being taught by teachers, who both role model heterosexual behaviors and tacitly sanction heterosexual norms through the 'erasure of homosexuality.' In his piece, Joseph Hermer examines moral regulators through a case study of "the Smokey Bear rules," a set of guidelines given to park performers directing them on how to act when in the Smokey persona. Hermer analyzes the Smokey rules as one example of the many governance texts which serve to order and regulate park experiences, creating parks as sites of "regulated wilderness."

Together these discussions stimulate consideration of the multi-faced and yet limiting nature of official representations of everything from sexuality and ethnicity to wilderness. In so doing they highlight the importance of symbolic representations of phenomena as diverse as social movements and technology.

As we put the final touches on Volume 13 of *Alternate Routes*, the collective would like to publicly thank David Robinson for his work over the years. More than anyone, it was David who was the driving force behind the journal, especially over the past two years when he was acting editor for Volumes 11 and 12. His hard work and dedication both to progressive political action and to the pursuit of academic excellence are reflected in the volumes which he edited. We wish him well and thank him for his past labours and continuing support. In all modesty, he asks that we also thank all those who work with him on past volumes, as well as those who supported the journal in other ways.



# **"Creative and Cultural Expression" but not art: Multiculturalism Arts Funding as Cultural Management**

***Sheryl N. Hamilton  
Concordia University***

## **INTRODUCTION**

Multiculturalism arts funding sits, somewhat uncomfortably, at the intersection of a number of sometimes contradictory, but singularly Canadian, discourses—discourses of Canadian cultural identity and multiculturalism. First, the discourse of Canadian cultural identity, resting upon the mythic narratives of the quest for community and the defence of sovereignty work to generate a need for the state to intervene in the ongoing production, reproduction, and protection of "Canadian culture." Second, Canada's "multicultural nature" relies upon a different mythic narrative of sovereignty, that of the threat from within. This combines with the cultural identity myth to create the need for the state to intervene in the management of cultural plurality.<sup>1</sup> These discourses combine to render the measure of success of Canadian multiculturalism arts funding, not aesthetic achievement, but rather, instrumental self-justification. The specific policy objectives and performance of the Creative and Cultural Expression Program of the Heritage Cultures and Languages Section of the Citizens' Participation and Multiculturalism Sector in the Department of Canadian Heritage are situated and interrogated as a case study within this particular discursive matrix. Although the stated objectives of this arts funding program are directed at the production of artistic creations, this

paper suggests that multiculturalism arts funding functions discursively to support and generate, not “art,” but rather a set of traces by which the Canadian government can “count ethnicity,” rendering it visible in a manageable form to simultaneously produce and prove Canada’s multicultural nature.

Raymond Breton suggests that the state has a role to play not only in managing the economic system of a nation, but also its symbolic order (Breton, 1984:127). He recognizes that the Canadian state has always played an active role in constructing the symbolic order, and while that role may have changed over time, the state has never absented itself (Breton, 1984:138). I suggest that Breton’s notion of the symbolic order can be usefully read as operating at two levels. First, the Canadian government has, from its inception, intervened in the production of Canada’s cultural or symbolic realm; from arts funding boards to tariffs on American magazines to creating institutions like the NFB, the Canadian government has clearly viewed the symbolic as one of its proper realms of intervention and operation.

Breton is correct in his suggestion that the Canadian state has never absented itself from the symbolic order. In fact, Canadians have become quite accustomed to this intervention, and have come perhaps even to expect it. What I want to explore in this analysis is *how* that intervention is both produced and legitimated, using a specific instance of multiculturalism arts policy. To do this, I read the symbolic order in a second way, as social discourse, and suggest that it is to the level of discourse that one must look to understand the function, role, and meanings of multiculturalism arts policy.<sup>2</sup>

## ARTS POLICY: COMMUNITY AND SOVEREIGNTY

The discursive production of Canadian cultural identity manifests in the long-familiar concerns over cultural colonization by our powerful neighbour to the South, concerns that there would be no Canadian culture without government support, concerns to maintain the high quality of Canadian cultural production (necessarily

non-commercial)—these fundamentally Canadian “worries” work together to create and legitimate a need for state intervention into the cultural realm. I suggest that the discourse of Canadian cultural identity relies on needs generated from two primary mythic narratives, discursive notions which have served to structure social relations. These two mythic structures are the search for community, that never ending quest to identify and name a Canadian unity, and the defence of Canadian cultural sovereignty against external threats, primarily located in the United States.

These mythic narratives are reproduced in a variety of institutional sites and are well-known to most Canadians; a few examples should suffice. The search for community is manifest in the assumed connection between the support and development of Canadian art and the corresponding result of a unified national identity. For example, an arts policy paper prepared for the current Liberal government asserts a connection between the funding of the arts and the bolstering of Canadian national identity: “Thus a government policy that promotes the arts and whose primary goal is cultural, by familiarizing individuals with all the characteristics of their own society, can help strengthen their sense of belonging and of cultural identity” (Lemieux, 1994:2). A cultural activist writes: “The notion that shared cultural expression is the key to nation building is a long-standing one and one that is widely accepted” (Spensley, nd:1).

A necessary corollary to finding our own community is its defence against the threat posed by other stronger communities. The mythic narrative of cultural sovereignty asserts that we must be ever vigilant in defending our fledgling identity. This discourse, too, is produced and reproduced in a number of institutional sites. For example, The Task Force on Funding of the Arts invokes a language of war and sovereignty:

... the arts lie at the heart of the cultural sovereignty battle. The spirit of a nation is expressed through the creative act, and the arts, by definition, are the focus of

that activity. But there is little to be gained in protecting our cultural industries if our works of art are moribund, or if a weakened arts infrastructure cannot supply the necessary talent and creative product. The arts are to cultural industries what research and development are to industry as a whole. Both sets of activities are essential to a country's development as a nation among its peers, in short, to the establishment of its sovereignty. (Task Force on Funding of the Arts, 1986:26)

Arts policy highlights the connectedness of these two myths:

All cultural policy is an expression of government willingness to adopt and implement a set of coherent principles, objectives and means to protect and foster a country's cultural expression. The arts are the very foundation of such expression. At a time when countries are becoming increasingly interdependent economically and politically, promoting cultural expression by means of a coherent cultural policy for the arts is a valuable way to emphasize and define what distinguishes one country from another.

Canada has considerable challenges in this regard. Its vast territory and small population make it difficult to produce, exchange, disseminate and communicate works of art, while its economic fragility threatens the very existence of artistic production. Canada must also contend with the constant cultural presence of the United States in this country and influence of this presence on the cultural identity of Canadians. (Lemieux, 1994:1)

These mythic narratives work to generate a need, a need to produce and protect Canadian cultural identity at all times. The very construction of this need offers the Canadian state as the body most suited to its address. This is made clear in policy documentation:



A country must be in control of its cultural destiny if it is to have a policy for the promotion of the arts: A country can be said to be culturally sovereign when it has the power to make its own decisions on its cultural future and the mechanisms for doing so; that is, when it enjoys the necessary freedom to permit cultural creativity and distribution, preservation and accessibility of its cultural production across its territory. This power includes the ability to adopt statutes and policies to create institutions and programs that will support all these activities. The omnipresent U.S. culture threatens Canadians' cultural identity and it is essential that we exercise sovereignty in this area if we are to survive as a distinct group with its own flourishing culture. (Lemieux, 1994:2)

Thus, because of the nature of the problem, the Canadian state is the proper "manager" of Canadian cultural identity.

It is not only in the area of arts and cultural policy, however, where the discourses of organic community and sovereignty play themselves out as rationales for the Canadian state's intervention into the symbolic order, but also in the institutional locale of multiculturalism policy.

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## **MULTICULTURALISM POLICY:**

### **THE THREAT FROM WITHIN**

It has been suggested that "multiculturalism" can be interpreted in four distinct ways: as empirical fact, as a set of cultural ideals, as policy, and as a process by which ethnic minorities achieve certain goals (Fleras, 1993:3). While all accurate, these characterizations do not go far enough to capture the discursive operation of multiculturalism in Canada. McLellan and Richmond come closer with their suggestion that multiculturalism "... can best be understood as a charter myth, an artificial creation that has restructured historical as well as existing social relations"

(McLellan and Richmond, 1994:679). Following McLellan and Richmond, I suggest that multiculturalism, like Canadian cultural identity, operates through a variety of mythic narratives which generate a need, a need which is filled, in this case, by the Canadian government's intervention to manage cultural pluralism.

Denise Helly defines cultural plurality as the presence in a society of persons belonging to a variety of social and cultural backgrounds (Helly, 1993:15). Canada, from its very inception, has been an ethnically and culturally pluralist nation. Plurality may result from immigration, from the constitution of national territory through appropriation from indigenous cultures, or in the case of Canada, both. Writing generally about culturally pluralist states, Helly suggests that "... government involvement in policies concerning cultural plurality is directed towards two domains—the behaviour of immigrant populations considered deviant, marginal or conflictual...and the particular forms of inequalitarian treatment by the native population" (Helly, 1993:16). Deviance, marginality, conflict, inequity—all potential risks to the stability of the liberal state. Thus, Helly identifies the first myth at work in the discourse of multiculturalism, a form of cultural sovereignty again, but in response to a risk from within.

Certainly the language of multiculturalism policy in Canada is not phrased in the language of Helly's first domain, namely the control of immigrant populations, but in the language of the latter, the management of the behaviour of the "native population" towards immigrant populations. For example, early critics of multiculturalism policy claimed that its primary, but unstated, purpose was to disempower Quebec nationalism. In the statement announcing multiculturalism policy made by then Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, on October 8, 1971, the risk clearly emanates from the possibility of reduced "choice" on the part of immigrants due to the native population:

...I wish to emphasize the view of the Government that



a policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework is basically the conscious support of individual freedom of choice. We are free to be ourselves. But this cannot be left to chance. It must be fostered and pursued actively. If freedom of choice is in danger for some ethnic groups, it is in danger for us all. It is the policy of this Government to eliminate any such danger and to "safeguard" this freedom. (Trudeau in Secretary of State, nd:46)

*The Multiculturalism Act* (1988), itself, states:

3 (1) It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Government of Canada to...

- (c) promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society and assist them in the elimination of any barrier to such participation

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In fact, risk arising from the incoming population is clearly rejected:

- (g) promote the understanding and creativity that arises from the interaction between individuals and communities of different origins.

Multiculturalism policy operates, discursively, to address the need to manage the "mainstream" population to ensure equity for all in a culturally pluralist population.

Analysts have also observed, however, that multiculturalism policy is directed at the first domain of Helly's analysis, namely, risk to the state arising from the immigrant population. Augie Fleras, for example, has suggested that multiculturalism policy functions to manage diversity (Fleras, 1993:2). Fleras, in his defence of multiculturalism policy, suggests: "Instead of 'nation-building,' the goals of multiculturalism are firmly fixed on

depoliticizing ethnicity as a collective phenomenon" (Fleras, 1993:6). Difference is managed through the replacing of collective with individual rights, as the former are a threat to state sovereignty. "The focus of multiculturalism is on managing these differences in a way that enhances the unity, identity, and integrity of Canada as a sovereign state" (Fleras, 1993:15).

While the policy may function to "manage difference," this intervention is also anchored in the charter myth of Canadian cultural identity, in this instance functioning to legitimate intervention into, not the artistic realm, but cultural plurality. The mythic narratives of Canadian cultural identity remain unchanged: the quest for organic community, this time composed of unity through diversity, and the defence of Canadian sovereignty, with cultural pluralism as a uniquely Canadian "weapon." Again, these discourses serve to make cultural plurality a proper domain of management for the Canadian state.

10 Fleras' analysis offers apt examples: "Canada resembles a handful of modern nations-state (sic) in the vanguard for constructing a coherent and secular society, without necessarily abandoning all vestiges of diversity" (Fleras, 1993:2). He further suggests, "Multiculturalism enhances a collective consciousness of ourselves as a tolerant and enlightened diversity" (Fleras, 1993:6). This organic community is also always a "managed" community. McLellan and Richmond suggest: "The Canadian example of multiculturalism, with its motto of 'unity in diversity,' can be seen as an attempt to structure a collective identity, or national consciousness..." (McLellan and Richmond, 1994:671). The *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* states:

3(1) It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Government of Canada to

- (b) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and that it provides an invaluable re-

source in the shaping of Canada's future;

These dual aspects of simultaneously organic and managed community are illustrated by the remarks of former Minister of Multiculturalism and Citizenship, Jerry Weiner, when he suggests:

When the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* was passed into law in 1988, it *established* that our multicultural diversity is a fundamental characteristic of our society, an essential part of what it means to be Canadian. (emphasis added; Weiner in Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada, 1990:i)

The existence of Canada as a culturally pluralist nation does not "establish" that this is integral to our national identity, rather this must be accomplished through a primary technology of the state, legislation.

Fleras makes express the sovereign implications of this distinct Canadian identity generated by our multicultural society: "... one could argue how our commitment to multiculturalism (within a bilingual framework) is the definitive characteristic that distinguishes Canada from the United States" (Fleras, 1993:6). Thus, our multicultural identity, as evidenced through state policy, becomes an element in our armour of cultural sovereignty.

While I am not disputing the accuracy of these writers' claims, I am attempting to highlight their discursive operation. I suggest that the role of multiculturalism as one of the hallmark discourses of Canadian cultural identity is both a product of, and productive of, the Canadian state's role in the management of culture. One of the ways in which these mythic narratives of Canadian cultural sovereignty, both from without and within, and organic community, come into effectivity is through the policy process. This process is located within, and constrained by, these narratives of legitimation through which the state justifies its intervention in civil society. I want to explore this process through a very unique and problematic government program, the

multicultural arts funding component of the Department of Canadian Heritage. My analysis suggests that what is funded under this program is not artists, nor even art, but rather, "pieces of multicultural art" which function as spectacles of identity, embedded in a process of cultural objectification, which simultaneously work to fix both cultural pluralism and cultural production as instrumentalities of the Canadian state, as manageable realms and realms properly managed.

### CREATIVE AND CULTURAL EXPRESSION BUT NOT ART?

Justin Lewis defines art as, "a cultural practice that involves the creation of a specific and definable object.... The function of that object is as a self-conscious, personal, or collective expression of something" (Lewis, 1990:5).<sup>3</sup> Lewis goes on to note, however, that when it comes to the funding of art, the more significant question is how a society defines artistic value (Lewis, 1990:6). The value of a work of art is not intrinsic to the artistic object itself, but is found in the set of social judgements made by those in positions to evaluate it. Therefore, the value of "multicultural art" is not inherent to the artistic products, themselves, but is embedded in the evaluation process. How is multicultural art identified and valued?

Established in the 1991 restructuring of the then Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada, the Creative and Cultural Expression Program (CCE) of the Heritage Cultures and Languages Branch (HCL) of the Citizen's Participation and Multiculturalism Sector of the Department of Canadian Heritage offers project funding in the areas of writing and publishing, arts and arts administration training, film and video production, and performing and visual arts through its grants programs. Grants are provided to support the creative expression of "artists from diverse ethnocultural or Aboriginal backgrounds" (Canadian Heritage, 1994:1).

The stated objectives of the CCE component are:



- to promote greater opportunity within and equal access to Canada's arts and cultural institutions for artists from diverse cultural backgrounds
  - to encourage and foster support for the development of the creative arts as a vehicle for the expression of heritage cultures in Canada and as a creative expression of Canadian multiculturalism
  - to support and promote writing and publishing, performing arts, visual arts, audio-visual and film projects that reflect and/or foster appreciation of the cultural diversity of Canadian society.
- (Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada, 1991:1)

Therefore, the stated objectives of funding the creative and cultural expression of artists from diverse cultural backgrounds is to improve their institutional access, to bolster multiculturalism, and to support projects that reflect or foster an appreciation of Canadian cultural diversity.

This policy rests upon three problematic assumptions. First, art is reduced to an instrumentality of the policy process. This is most clear in the second objective—"to encourage and foster support for the development of the creative arts as a vehicle for the expression of heritage cultures in Canada and as a creative expression of Canadian multiculturalism." Art is conceived as a "vehicle" for multiculturalism (policy). In this respect, funding is directed towards art objects and arts structures, rather than towards artists. The overall objective is not to fund quality art, but rather to promote multiculturalism as a part of Canadian artistic and cultural life and to foster appreciation of cultural diversity. The individual art project identified as worthy of funding is merely an instrument in, and of, this process.

Second, I suggest that the interaction between the requirement that only artists who are from "diverse ethnocultural or Aboriginal backgrounds" and the third objective of the CCE Program imposes a functional test of value on artistic creation.

Individual artistic projects are funded on the basis of whether they "reflect and/or foster appreciation of the cultural diversity of Canadian society." These work together to suggest that not all art produced by "artists of diverse ethnocultural or Aboriginal backgrounds" would necessarily meet this standard. Second, and more significantly, it reminds us that the criteria for art produced by these artists is not artistic merit or aesthetic value, but whether the art serves the policy function prescribed in the objectives.

Finally, and related to the other two assumptions, the CCE objectives and the Program as a whole assume that there is, and should be, a distinction between art which reflects and develops Canadian cultural diversity and that which does not, namely, between "multicultural art" and "art." Some administrative practices within the program also support these assumptions. Unlike the Canada Council and provincial arts boards, the CCE Program is not at arm's length from the government, and the final approval for all grants rests with the Minister of Canadian Heritage. Although a peer review process is used, jury members are aware that they are making recommendations only. They are always also aware of the policy objectives of the Program when evaluating individual applications, and are not therefore, evaluating projects solely on "artistic merit."<sup>4</sup>

I suggest that the three assumptions and the institutional practices in support of them work to produce a result that what is funded by this arts funding program is not, in fact, art, but something else. Peter Li has recently argued cogently that multiculturalism arts policy continues to be problematic, resulting in a bifurcation of the art world and the reinforcement of dominant cultural hegemony. Li states:

... the arts belong to a cultural domain which is subjected to the influence of the state. As a major patron of arts and culture, the state provides the financial support and infrastructural conditions for the development and maintenance of dominant arts. In a



multicultural society like Canada, the state also maintains a separate policy toward the promotion and preservation of minority cultures and arts. In so doing, the Canadian state, through its role as the major sponsor and patron of arts and minority cultures, creates the unequal infrastructural conditions which are conducive to developing two types of art and culture. In this sense, dominant arts and subordinate minority cultures are at least partly perpetuated by state intervention. (Li, 1994:366-7)

While Li's arguments are persuasive, I suggest that his analysis replicates the assumptions underpinning the objectives of the CCE Program. First, Li assumes that the purpose of the CCE Program is to fund multicultural art according to a differential, but nonetheless, aesthetic standard. For example, he writes: "Since 1971, Canada has maintained a federal multicultural policy to assist and promote the art and culture of visible minorities" (Li, 1994:376). His (arguably valid) complaint is with the separateness of the program through which minority art is funded (Li, 1994:377). He does not consider the possibility that the objective is not "to assist and promote the art and culture of visible minorities," but rather to fund art and cultural objects, produced by visible minorities, providing they function to illustrate and foster the cultural diversity of Canada. In short, Li is assuming that first and foremost the program functions to fund art.

Second, Li's linking of aesthetic standards to cultural hegemony tends towards an instrumentality also reflected in the Program. While he correctly suggests "... cultural domination involves not only imposing the aesthetic standards of the dominant group, but also creating the institutional framework for reproducing minority art, culture and heritage in forms and manners that are consistent with maintaining the hegemony of the dominant group" (Li, 1994:369), the use of hegemony theory

tends to reproduce the demarcation between art produced by “ethnic” artists and that produced by “mainstream” artists. It relies upon a fixed notion of identity and an instrumental relation between ethnicity and artistic expression. Li suggests that when artists of colour produce art that is reflective of the dominant aesthetic, they have clearly been hegemonized (Li, 1994:370, 382). I suggest the problem is not necessarily in a multiplicity of aesthetics, but rather with the discursive production of “multicultural art”—“multicultural art,” which is, I suggest, a very different notion than the art of artists of colour—as a clearly identifiable object which can be identified, evaluated, and funded.

Li’s analysis, while useful and cogent, starts from the assumption that the CCE Program has as its primary objective and function to fund artistic creation. I suggest that the curious combination of assumptions, objectives, and practices work to produce and support something very different than artistic creation. I argue that situated as it is at the intersection of discourses of arts policy and of multiculturalism that the CCE Program in fact constitutes a means by which cultural pluralism is fixed, identified, counted, and used to simultaneously demonstrate the need for, and success of, multiculturalism policy.

In its task of managing ethnic diversity, the state faces the dilemma of objectifying or concretizing ethnicity. In fact, the production of “statistics” on ethnicity is provided for in the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*:

3(2) It is further declared to be the policy of the Government of Canada that all federal institutions shall

- (d) collect statistical data in order to enable the development of policies, programs and practices that are sensitive and responsive to the multicultural reality of Canada...

Notwithstanding the above provisions, numerous scholars have noted the problems associated with the accurate reporting of

ethnicity in statistics given the fluid nature of personal identity. There is no consensus about how best to identify ethnicity, either among policy-makers or academics (McLellan and Richmond, 1994:673).

One of the ways through which ethnicity is manifest, however, is through culture.

... what distinguishes each nation or ethnic group is its culture, which provides the "content" of group identity and individuality. And if culture is pressed into service to distinguish one bounded collectivity from another, it too must be bounded: that is, culture must be analyzable and identifiable, such and such a 'trait' belonging to this nation or originating in that region. (Handler, 1988:15-16)

Others, too, recognize that culture is notoriously difficult to measure, but that it reproduces itself, symbolically, in the creation of art (Li, 1994:367; Blau, 1994:7-8). Art, then, can be seen as a trait of culture and of ethnicity.

Within this context of attempting to measure ethnicity, products of cultural expression become what McLellan and Richmond refer to as "spectacles to symbolize identity" (McLellan and Richmond, 1994:673). They assert that culture becomes a set of "... objects to be scrutinized, identified, revitalized and consumed in a process that Handler...calls 'cultural objectification'" (McLellan and Richmond, 1994:674). Drawing upon anthropological work in appropriating cultural objectification, Handler is attempting to encapsulate the process of viewing culture as an object, or thing, naturally composed of certain identifiable traits (Handler, 1988:14).

I would add to McLellan and Richmond's list above that cultural objects can also be *counted* as proof of ethnicity. In this way, identity can be fixed. Representation can be owned, located, quantified, and reproduced in bounded terms. Although his specific example is Quebec's winter carnival, Handler's point

applies to multiculturalism arts policy, when he suggests that cultural objects

... are as much social-scientific as nationalistic, for they are researched—and often organized and legitimated—by professional social scientists or by amateur scholars who take the work of professionals as their model. And politicians and governments intent on “nation building” routinely draw on scientific, objectifying analyses of national culture, either because they believe in them or because they understand the legitimating value of “an appeal to social scientific expertise.” (Handler, 1988:14)

McLellan and Richmond apply Handler’s analysis directly to multiculturalism policy and argue that, “cultural objectification, as a self-conscious representation of authenticity, distinguishes the ethnic and/or religious group, providing the ‘content’ for group identification and analysis as a component of the diversity that is conceptualized as multiculturalism” (McLellan and Richmond, 1994:674). Multiculturalism policy relies upon cultural objectification to function.

One of the most dramatic indicators of this process of cultural objectification can be found in two recent promotional showpieces of the work of the CCE Program: a comprehensive catalogue of funded film and video projects and a comprehensive bibliography of all funded writing and publishing projects (Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada, 1993a, 1993b). These glossy catalogues are basically “lists” of the achievements of the Program. They are indexed by ethnocultural group, in addition to title, author, and subject and each project is described briefly. These catalogues bear witness to the success of the Program, but also, at the same time, the need for the Program and for multiculturalism policy. In the collections, individual projects are removed from their literary or artistic context, and become spectacles of identity, which through the process of cultural



objectification, trace cultural pluralism. As material traces of the diversity of Canadian society and culture, these catalogues simultaneously reinforce the ongoing need for state management of the cultural realm and act as a quantitative measure of the success of that management.

## CONCLUSION

Multicultural art, to receive funding under the CCE Program, must first and foremost function to reflect and foster an appreciation of the cultural diversity of Canadian society. This has nothing necessarily to do with an art object's value as art, but has everything to do with managing culture, both in the sense of arts and cultural production and in the sense of the culturally pluralistic nature of Canadian society. I do not mean to suggest through my argument that an impressive range of diverse, daring, and high quality art is not being produced through the funding initiatives of the CCE Program; in fact, it is. I am suggesting, however, that any success in this regard is ancillary to the discursive processes at work in the primary policy objectives.

The CCE program serves as an example of how the Canadian state intervenes to manage both cultural production and cultural pluralism; this management being simultaneously made necessary by, and legitimized through, the mythic narratives of the quest for Canadian community and the defence of Canadian cultural sovereignty, both from without and within. These mythic narratives are reproduced in the three assumptions reflected in the CCE Program—that art can and should function as a technology of the state's management of culture; that “multicultural art” should be valued according to how effectively it functions as an instrument of creating Canadian cultural identity and defending Canadian sovereignty; and finally that “multicultural art” is something other than “art.” Within the CCE Program, multicultural art functions discursively not as art, but rather as a technology of the Canadian state in its ongoing management of Canadian culture.

## NOTES

1. I am not asserting any claims as to the truth or falsity of these rhetorics, myths, and discourses, rather I am concerned with their effectivity.
2. My analysis is indebted to the work of Martin Allor and Michelle Gagnon in *L'État de Culture: Généalogie Discursive Des Politiques Culturelles Québécoises* (1994) and their suggestion of a framework for the application of a Foucauldian notion of social discourse to the realm of cultural policy.
3. While certainly not daring, I am treating this definition, for the purposes of this article, as adequate.
4. The analysis of the administrative practices is grounded in my experience in administering the Arts Apprenticeship Program of CCE from 1994-1995.

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# Property Rights and Communication

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

In the current federal neo-policy and neo-regulation process in the communications sector<sup>2</sup>, euphemistically referred to as the Information Highway, the development, rules of governance and terms of access to information and communication networks are being framed by the preferences for, and extension of, private property rules and practices. These policies and practises erode and undermine the democratic common property right of access to information and knowledge.<sup>3</sup> Canadians' right of access will be undermined in a market approach due to lack of sufficient financial resources and the availability of affordable, quality service featuring diversity of content. A "have and have not" bifurcation in Canada based on such factors as income, education, and geographic location will become exacerbated in communication and information.

The ramifications of this policy change extend beyond the current narrow debates emanating from government and industry leaders about the use, ownership or, ostensibly, the wealth generating or emancipatory potentials of the technologies. Interestingly, such prophetic claims are even being made by those on different sides of this issue. Some public interests attribute an empowerment of public rights through the new technologies. This tendency of limiting public discussion and analysis to the potentialities of technology obscures and dismisses the broader issues relating to social and economic justice. The two dominant views emerging from these technological determinist perspectives are that such omnipotent technology will lead us either to

some utopian economic or to social/cultural panacea.

Technologies are not drivers of change, but tools subject to political, economic and social forces and decision making. What is significant in the current changes is that the stakes involve not so much the technologies, but information. This is a resource of the mind, language and humanity. Information is the stuff of understanding, communication, creativity and change. But how do we think about information? Questions of its control raise structural issues, but the more fundamental issues of availability, diversity, quality and need, necessary for a level of 'natural' human existence, can broaden debate to the universal dimension and importance of the resource.

24 In a broader political economic context, information is being subjected to a process of privatization and commercialisation, particularly in those aspects of life which until now have been unquestionably considered public. This deepening and extension of private property market relations is a broad assault upon the previously non-commodified public and private (individual) activities, space, relations and lives of people and society. So what is the problem? Why should this concern us? Quite simply, with the destruction and transformation of public information and public space, the basis of democracy, of economic and social justice, is threatened (Schiller, 1986:39).

This paper considers these issues in four parts. The first section offers a way of theorizing or thinking about information as a property right in the context of the role of the state and our communication system. The next two sections consider how this is being played out as process and practice in Canadian policy making and communication industry restructuring. These sections also analyse the class dimensions of this change, and the actors and social claims being made in this struggle. This includes an analysis of the strategies being used by different class actors and agents within the core state policy making apparatus. The concluding section revisits these core themes and considers the potential for the realization of the 'market' or 'democratic' goals



in the emerging information society.

## INFORMATION

Before considering the changes in Canadian information and communication policy, it is useful to define what is meant by information, its role, and the claims which have come to be made on it in a capitalist liberal democratic market society (CMS).

Much of how we think about information is defined by how we think about society, our view of society and people's place in it. The difficulty in defining information lies in attempting to separate what it is or where we find it, from what one does with it or what it should be used for. This difficulty is more clouded as one tries to abstract 'information' from the context of the political economic relations of the society in which we live. Within the structural context of our society, information is often posited in terms of spheres, for example the social sphere, the education sphere, the market sphere, and so forth. While this helps us in clarifying our views of society, it risks artificially polarizing or drawing lines between what are more aptly described as interdependent or mutually influencing processes and activities (Resnick and Wolfe, 1987).<sup>4</sup> We can each be economic, political, social and cultural actors in separate processes and activities and in various combinations or degrees. The point is that, at times, with some of these there is a preponderance of one type of activity or process over the others—more social than economic, or more cultural than social, let us say.

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In thinking about society this way, there are a number of ways of thinking about a 'public' as opposed to a 'market' view of information—what it is, what it should be, or how it is used. Herb Schiller, who has long argued for the protection of information rights, sees information as central to the development of a democratic society. As Schiller writes,

information serves to facilitate democratic decision making, assists in citizen participation in government,

and contributes to the search for roughly egalitarian measures in the economy at large (1991:42).

In this view, of information as a social good, a democratic resource, benefits the lives of individuals, and through its collective use, the overall governance of society. Indirectly, or as a subsequent step through its use, information provides economic benefits by providing people with the means and ability to participate and benefit from direct economic exchange. As well, information allows people to participate in a host of other activities, which by their very nature, provide the 'economic sector' with an 'informed subject'. By 'informed subject' I mean individuals who, through their ability to access and benefit from information (literacy, education, experience, etc.), are able to contribute to the general economic, social and cultural production of society. They have a demand for the information and other products of society arising from their participation (Zuboff, 1988:9-10).<sup>5</sup>

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Michael Apple, borrowing from Pierre Bourdieu, differentiates information as symbolic capital from information as financial capital. On the one hand, information as financial capital is useful only in the sense that it can be valued as a physical commodity, its value is defined by its exchange (sale) value and time value (generally short term). On the other hand, Apple appeals to the more abstract and 'public' nature of information when he describes it as also symbolic capital (Apple, 1991:25). Simply put, this value is cultural in the sense that it is a lived, every day resource. It is accessible, usable, and readily exchangeable for its own sake and not based on a commodity transaction. Through this, the developmental qualities of information arise.

The underlying theme of such views, is that information is first, diverse, broad, dynamic—a product of humanity and interaction—ideas in substance. Secondly, perhaps most importantly in terms of *practise*, and the battlefront in current policy making, information is a public resource that allows for the achievement



of some 'end' goals. In a democratic view, these goals allow people to learn, express, exchange and interact in social and cultural ways for the sake of personal well being, development and understanding. It is that which contributes to being a citizen and to the maximization of one's individual utilities and abilities. This is a view of society that includes commerce rather than the inverse, a commercial market system that includes society. The corollary to this is that individuals are then able to participate in society and benefit from this. Whether a capitalist market society or some other form, in this view people can participate in activities and social relations which allow for 'production' that reproduces one's self and society. In our liberal democratic capitalist market society this should include, and give some balance to, the two sets of property rights; the 'democratic'—civil, social, political rights and activities—and 'liberal'—economic activities.

An imbalance between the 'liberal' and 'democratic', whereby the liberal (market, economic) is given too much weight erodes an economic justice perspective underlying the democratic view whereby social norms and ethical values prevail over impersonal market values (Clement, 1988: 14). In the hierarchy of individual rights, civil and political rights can be satisfied on an individual basis, though there is a collective purpose to these. However, social and economic rights, which now increasingly rely on the ability of individuals to access and use modern communications and information to be fully realized, need collective property rights to fully develop and be realized (Clement, 1988: 14). This is the basis of the current contradiction within capitalism such that the imbalance favours individual private property.

However, to achieve these democratic goals in a complex modern society at either an individual or collective level is near impossible without those institutions, practices or processes generally thought of as the 'public sphere'. This, in addition to the 'market sphere or sector', is the other half of the front in the battle to determine what it is and what information ought to be.

Habermas has characterized the social sphere or process as “the realm of social life where public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens .... citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion”, in other words freedom of association and expression (1974:49-55). The institutions we associate with these processes can be informal or formal. These include schools, libraries, cultural organizations, or more informal means of interaction, such as local groups. However, and this takes us back to the nexus of the conflict in communication policy, the means required to do this in a collective way in a complex society are the various physical communication media, technologies and institutions. These would include traditional media—the text, the newspaper, magazine, newsletter, public meeting, radio, television, and the new media, computer-based networks and similar technologies.

## DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS, INFORMATION AS PROPERTY

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In a liberal democratic capitalist market society some amount of information will invariably be a commodity—a liberal market valued resource. Information will also be a democratically valued resource, a common public good.

How should we argue for and defend the democratic aspect of information? This could be done in many ways, such as using political or social rights arguments. In a market society, an appropriate case can be made through an argument based on property. Our society values property over all else, and defines the right of property as an individual right. In the current policy debate over information; the rights to it, its use and access, can usefully be grounded in a theory of property that underpins our liberal democratic market society. Using property rights as an entry point for analysis permits a discussion of democratic objectives as well as providing the means to reveal and explore the inherent contradictions in the current market centred debate over information, and the possible resolutions of this debate. These possible resolutions can have democratic or anti-demo-

cratic consequences.

The work of C.B. Macpherson (1973, 1978, 1985) is useful for this analysis because it helps us position information as a fundamental human right and a property right. This work also sets out the role of the state and the tensions and contradictions arising in a capitalist market society (CMS) in the articulation and achievement of such property rights. The challenge is to achieve some mitigation between an individual right to private property (market valuation) and an individual right to common (public) property (democratic valuation) as it relates to information. In the first, the right exists to exclude others from access unless certain economic terms are met. In the second, the right is to not be excluded from the use or benefit of something, though some limits over collective access may exist. These limits generally ensure measures of equality.

The stakes are high in current policy making as radical neo-liberal ideology drives its agenda across a broad sweep of state responsibilities and initiatives (Clark, 1991).<sup>6</sup> The contemporary debate about communication and information policy has become limited to a religious-like mantra from the proponents of the liberal market place. This mantra of competition, privatization, and deregulation argues for a rigid ideological adherence to social relations exclusively based on individual private property relations. Entrenchment of such a view in policy would reduce society to that which is only peopled by economic producers and consumers. This agenda is a crude narrowing from a view of society, of 'mankind' and social practise, though not in any way in equilibria, that included that of the *citizen in democracy*. Instead, an economic vision is propagated that takes the form of a religion because it claims to be the inevitable result of higher, more powerful forces than individuals or society; a god or gods—the market, technology, globalization. This view imposes closure on other views and alternative ways of seeing and doing. It advocates conformity and impotence.

This tension between market freedom and the need to set



limits to achieve democratic, common freedom and opportunity is summarized by Macpherson in the following statement:

When the individual property right is written into law as an individual right to the exclusive use and disposal of parcels of the resources provided by nature and parcels of the capital created by past work on them, and when it is combined with the liberal system of market incentives and rights of free contract, it leads to and supports a concentration of ownership and a system of power relations between individuals and classes which negates the ethical goal of free and independent, individual development (1978:199-200).

30 In communication, this liberal market narrowing occurs with the unequal relations involving exclusive control over, the creation of, the terms of access to, and use of, information. This includes the shaping and valuating of information and knowledge and how its worth (economic or other) is determined. The current policy and market trends are an intensification of the process Raymond Williams identified as a 'selective tradition' whereby someone's vision of legitimate knowledge, information and culture "enfranchises one group's cultural capital at the expense of another" (Williams, in Apple and Christian-Smith, 1991:1).

Currently, the trend is to the privatization of information, the materialization of information into a thing that can be commodified, and the institutionalization of these inherently unequal class-based relations (legal, economic, political). People, in this liberal market view, are seen as 'market man', a maximum utilizer of resources and capacities. This model of society features competing individuals—consumers and appropriators (extractors)—where the accumulation of property, in this case information, is an end in itself. Developmental possibilities for other objectives (e.g., social, cultural, political, common capital) are excluded in this view. Interestingly, in the liberal market view this accumulation for self gain is equated to at its most fundamental level with



the end goal of freedom. This goal is shared with the democratic purpose of property, which the individual property right presupposes. However, by privileging private individual over collective individual rights, it negates the achievement of a broader sense of freedom (Macpherson, 1973:82-86; 1978:46-47).

Applying Macpherson's ideas to information, and the political relations of this property, one way of viewing the current contestation over communication policy making is over the morality of different property claims. In other words, contestation over what information and the terms of its creation and access are, and ought to be. The underlying right is not contested by liberal or democratic proponents in this debate. But the contradiction arises when the set of *economic claims* (private ownership) are posed against *democratic claims* (not to be excluded, common property). Historically in Canadian communication policy making, there has been agency or mutual determination in this debate over goals and practises. Over time, this has resulted in a mix of economic and social policies designed to mitigate or balance such claims, e.g., the development of public broadcasting, or provincially and privately owned telecommunication networks, Canadian content, obligation to serve. Still, these remain inherently contradictory claims in a capitalist market system (Macpherson, 1978:3,5; 1985:84).

This battle over democratic and liberal ideals is being played out in many sectors of which communication and information is only one. Others include welfare state institutions and practises, education, health, transportation and finance. The state's role is central in these changes. Only the state can make policy and manage national economic, political and social relations. Moreover, while individuals may have the rights of property, it is the state that creates or changes these rights and establishes the institutions (e.g., law) that protects these rights, sets limits on them, and authorizes or enables their articulation in social relations. The state is the terrain of contestation over claims and the resulting output is policy in the broadest sense. Although this

contestation has always been unequally weighted or tilted in favour of the economic or capitalist class, the policy goals of neo-liberals will further erode the democratic potential and practices in communications by limiting the state's role and ability to seek some balance or mitigation between these claims.

The view of these neo-liberal proponents is that the state's role must be minimal—for the protection and stabilization of markets and individual economic liberty. This liberty takes the form of both producer rights and consumer rights (whereby those with the most ability to pay have access, as opposed to participatory democracy whereby all *citizens* rather than *consumers* have the right of access in order to realize personal benefits in some measure of equality). This static liberal view of 'mankind' and society sees social purpose and social relations as extractive (self-interest and gain). In the discourse of the day, the 'market' and 'competition', normally thought of as 'means' to an end, become 'ends' in themselves. Any social, cultural, political or other collective democratic purpose is discounted or marginalized. In the final analysis, this view reduces information to a commodity to be accumulated or exchanged for capital. As a consequence, social relations involving information are not to be developmental and shared whereby individuals could equally have access to personally benefit, grow and develop (Macpherson, 1985:57-58).

## INFORMATION, OPPORTUNITY AND CRISIS

If not technological or other determinisms, then what are the key factors behind the marketization of public information? Information has always been important as part of the economic and social capital of society. What is different in the current era of competition is the strategic purpose ascribed to information by decision makers in society, and in particular members of the dominant capital class, including the state. At the heart of the matter is the potential and the increasing ability to extend the control, production and use of information as an industrial sector in its own right.

Two decades ago, the 'information economy' was seen by liberal theorists as a logical extension of industrialism (Bell, 1973). More recently, it has come to be defined as the necessary strategy to escape a crisis of our capitalist market society.

The value, strategically or economically, of information has always existed in human relations. Harold Innis (1951) in his various writings, has emphasized the importance of a balance between monopolization or control of information and its decentralization and accessibility. For Innis, the bias of communication meant that at certain historic junctures the strategic choice, design and use of certain technologies biased power and social relations in society. The inequalities of such monopolization in modern society, in this view, are intertwined with the way western society has made a religion of science and the machine. Innis states, "industrialism implies technology and the cutting of time into precise fragments suited to the needs of the engineer and the accountant" (Innis, 1951:140). In this statement, Innis characterizes the essence of the information age, the commodification of time and its disjuncture from long term thinking, continuity and broader social purpose. In an industrialized or post-industrial society, one that is linked by mass communication, whether text, electronic or other form, the measurement and commodification of time also includes the destruction and repackaging of time's content, and this content is information. Modern communication, on this basis, emphasizes individualism over collectivism, instability and change over stability and permanence, and competition over participation (Innis, 1951:80-81).

In the 1960s, proponents of an 'information society' or economy touted this as a goal that was a natural extension and growth of a market society. Theorists such as Daniel Bell (1973), an early apostle of the post-industrial society, saw information as the valued industry of the future. In keeping with a liberal market view, this extension of the market would result in efficiency, productivity and growth benefitting all.

The information society, first seen as an evolutionary expect-



tation, has since become an ideological imperative considered by decision makers as necessary for systemic survival in the face of economic crisis. The crisis has variably been described as one of production or overproduction, too much low cost foreign competition, under consumption, falling rate of profit, and so forth. Responses have resulted in the restructuring of policy, economic and social relations and institutions, leading to mass unemployment, a reduction in support for human services, and unqualified faith in an idealized notion of competition. State policy has favoured redistribution benefitting the market at the expense of the citizenry, with a rather specific effort of narrowing and redefining traditionally de- or uncommodified aspects of life. For the market, this has meant less government control and oversight of corporate behaviour, a declining quality of work, and the removal of the traditional policy barriers which make market practises publicly accountable. Essential to the policy of escape from crisis (also euphemistically referred to as restructuring) is the pursuit for more competition, the creation of an idealized market utopia, and a focus on the development of an information industry (Webster and Robins, 1986:319; Schiller, 1986:30).

This is done while social and cultural activities which meet individual needs but have no direct relation to commerce are ignored. They have not, nor can they have by their very definition, commodity value in and of themselves in order to accomplish their intended purpose. Any attempt to privilege the economic or commodity criteria as more important, or better able to deliver the service, means that only the most profitable rather than the most necessary or useful service is available.

But these changes are not some instrumentally foreordained set of practises and conclusions. Change involves social struggle and competing claims. This holds true with information and technology and for the broader social and economic policies and practises of society. Competing claims by social actors, though often made within a set of unequal power relations, none-the-less shape final policy outcomes and social practises. Agency, which



is the effectiveness of resistance or initiative by social actors, whether from within the dominant class against others in this class, or arising from those in the subordinate classes, mutually influence results (Foucault, 1972:162-163).

The current changes in Canadian capitalism are being led as much from within by fractions of the capitalist class as from external outside forces. Such change approximates Gramsci's notion of reform from within or a passive revolution (1971: 106-107). As argued by Michel Foucault, the success of this 'reformed' hegemony, its permanence, requires its pervasion into the conscious and subconscious levels of society and the citizenry. Hegemony is society's social *glue* of understanding and world view. The complexity of modern society relies on the use of technology and, increasingly, the control of information "to pervade the whole of the social body" (Foucault, 1972:156). The existing class-based ownership and power relations of media/information ownership backed by state complicity puts democratic claims at a particular disadvantage in the current period of change. The claims made by dominant class actors to support or validate these inequalities are expressed in a way which ostensibly appeals to shared democratic ideals, but in reality cannot deliver because they are based on economic criteria alone. This ideology has power through its social dominance. It attempts to frame discourse and seeks to control opinion and ideas, to define the acceptable parameters of discussion, and the possible. Its goal is to define how we are to see and value society and, as part of this, information and knowledge. Information is, therefore, not inherently just, equal or democratic. It must be constructed and shaped by social relations. For it to be democratic (in access, diversity, and use value) it must be defined as such, and the claims seeking this must be broadly recognized (social consciousness), accepted (political) and institutionalized (law and practise) (Foucault, 1972:162). The prospect for achieving this broader democratic view in the current struggle over our changing hegemony as it relates to information seems thin.

## POLICY, DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL REALITY

This section considers the shifts in federal policy in Canada necessary to accommodate the process of information commodification and marketization, and the strategies employed by the market, as well as the responses of social actors. In so doing, it highlights the class dimension of the dominant actors within and outside the state, and the social relations which are emerging in our 'information society'.

Neither the state, dominant or subordinate social classes are homogenous in their ideologies, values or practises in the relations involving the competing claims of rights, strategies or objectives in the changes relating to information and the communication sector. There is no homogeneity in the views of actors within each of the government, market or public sectors. Agents with differing views of society, characterized by opposing liberal and democratic objectives, exist within groups in each sector. Competition for dominance (policy and practise) of ideas is ongoing between agents within each sector and between sectors. But these are not simple 'pluralistic' relations. Domination by elites based on different types of power (e.g., economic, political) is also inherent in each of these groups and sectors, though particularly so with industry and the state.

This domination is based on both the class and power positions of members. This is clearer and more established in state and capitalist class components than social groups. While social groups (e.g., low-income, seniors, cultural organizations, etc.) are class-based, they tend to see themselves more in terms of special or group interests (Jenson, 1989:83). In policy making, the world view is more conducive of, and an acquiescence to, a pluralistic view of social interaction and representation. As a result this masks the underlying structural inequalities and limits the public's ability to achieve substantive change. This difference allows discursive and ideological appeals by the state, in an attempt to justify and achieve public consensus on policy and

values, to be phrased as being in the interest of the citizenry. This occurs in particular where these pronouncements tend to appeal to democratic objectives while masking structural changes benefitting individual private property practises. The discourse of the dominant class also conceals the inherent economic (power) inequalities of this agenda. While appealing to the values of participatory democracy or a broad notion of community and shared values/benefits, in practise what is being promoted is a system of consumer or *dollar democracy*. Dollar democracy, based on one's ability to pay, becomes the ticket to individual participation and equity. The antithesis, participatory democracy, in its broadest sense, is the ability to have equal access to, and equally share in, the cumulative social and capital production of society. In the market place, this democratic 'end' and purpose for social and economic restructuring, exists in name only. It becomes a justification for change but with no real prospect of delivery due to the underlying inequalities and structural limitations of class-based economic relations.

The main armaments used by government and industry to date to create acceptance by the public of these changes are propaganda and policy/regulatory changes. Using government jargon, the 'optics' of the message for change focus on claims of the socially and economically liberating benefits of an information society. This justificatory strategy is shared by market players. Government alone, but in close consultation/negotiation with the dominant market actors, has also, and continues to, rewrite policy and regulation necessary to reconstruct and lay the foundations for structural changes to permit the privatization and commodification of information.

The concordance of ideological views between decision makers in government and dominant information industry actors is reflected in formal policies, public and private sectors documents, and studies which serve as justificatory devices to affect public opinion in support of such change. As well, special initiatives are undertaken, such as public hearings, e.g., Informa-



tion Highway Advisory Council (IHAC), Canadian Radio-television Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). These formal and informal hearings are used by government to create the appearance of inclusion and to dispel opposition. With few exceptions, the resulting policy outputs are only partially shaped but not changed in any substantive way by public claims. The shared government and industry ideology proscribes the reliance on market forces to achieve economic, social and cultural goals or betterment. Perhaps one of the most damaging examples of this ideological shift, given its broad impact on structuring the framework of the information society, was the writing of the 1993 Telecommunications Act. The Act contains the contradictory objectives: "to safeguard, enrich and strengthen the social and economic fabric of Canada" (Sect. 7.a.); "be affordable and accessible to all Canadians" (Sect. 7.b.); respond to the "economic and social requirements of users" (Sect. 7.h.); and, in a shift to a *method* instead of an end, "to foster increased reliance on market forces for the provision of telecommunications services" (Sect. 7.f.). In practise, this 'method' section has become the overriding context and *raison d'être* used by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunication Commission (CRTC) and policy branches in Industry Canada for setting the framework for policy decisions, while other sections are considered subordinate or irrelevant.

This approach is not unique to Canada. In the U.S., the government has ordained that "the Information Highway is to be built, owned and operated by the private sector" (McChesney, 1995:7). In reflecting on these changes in the U.S., McChesney observes that their communication policy "was written by and for business in the U.S. and is one of the most corrupt pieces of legislation in U.S. history" (1995:8). McChesney argues this is corrupt not only due to the back room dealing making between government decision makers and corporate lobbyists, but also because, as has become the model in Canada, social issues are relegated to a caretaking item to be dealt with after a commercial



system is in place.

In Canada, a plethora of government decisions, documents and studies similarly promote this way of seeing technology, information and the presumed benefits for society. In its decision on restructuring the telephone and cable industries in Canada (the main players in our information society) the CRTC saw telecommunications as "a tool for information management and a productivity enhancer for business" (CRTC, 1994a:1). Two of the core objectives for the CRTC in their decision were universal access and to "encourage development and widespread availability of new technology and innovative services to respond to the needs of business and residence consumers" (1994a:2). In this narrow view of a society populated by producers and buyers, lost are the notions of affordability and access to other forms of not-commercial content by *citizens* and the use of this for other *not-for-profit purposes*.

Similarly, the introduction of the final report of the federal government's Information Highway Advisory Council (IHAC) clearly sets the benchmarks for the new social reality in stating,

In the new information economy, success will be determined by the market place, not by government.....

The private sector should build and operate the Information Highway" (IHAC, 1995:x).

The governments' role is relegated to that of referee and the setting of ground rules.

Private property as the heart of current social change is also exemplified by proposed changes to copyright law with respect to information. Copyright determines the ownership of a commodity as well as its terms of access. At its core, the creation of an information market relies on this form of property creation and legal protection. The federal government's IHAC report on copyright determines that "copyright and the development of appropriate mechanisms are fundamental to the creation of a content market place to give the Information Highway its *raison*

d'etre" ( NGL Nordicity Group Ltd., 1995, :71).

Even the terms of reference and the fifteen issues identified for analysis by the IHAC were cast using a market framework valuation. The issues were:

1. Timing and Financing
2. Competition and Regulation
3. Canadian Ownership and Control
4. Standards
5. Government Co-ordination
6. Copyright and Intellectual Property
7. Culture and Content
8. Information Controls
9. Government Programs and Services
10. Privacy and Security
11. Research and Development
12. Growth and Competitiveness
13. Universal Access
14. Consumer Awareness and Learning
15. Government Operations (IHAC, 1995:v,vi).

40 Of these, Issues 7—Culture and Content and 13—Universal Access would suggest some reprieve for social and cultural concerns. However, a closer reading shows that culture and content issues were largely approached from the perspective of copyright (getting paid for products) and the international marketing of Canadian cultural products. This trade view undermines the non-economic valuation of culture in Canada, as exemplified, for example, by the cultural exemption secured under the North American Free Trade Agreement. Universal access is defined as an objective where government should only intervene if market failure occurs (IHAC, 1995:121,169). The common property right of access particularly in terms of social and cultural infrastructure is thereby dismissed.

It is also government confirming industry's ability to develop, own, and control access to information within the broad policies of neo-regulation, privatization and commercialization that is essential to a commitment by industry to invest in, and

expand, this market. That government is compliant in this, often with little or no empirical economic or social research and justificatory evidence to support claims for the need of such change, is not always enough for industry. Industry players have produced reams of studies, reports and analyses which promote these same objectives. However, they package these with threats of capital withdrawal, hold-back or under investment in an attempt to keep government decision makers on course. Government is warned that if it doesn't tow the line the Information Highway will not be built, jobs will be not created, and Canada will not be competitive and grow economically (CCTA, 1994).<sup>7</sup>

Key industry actors also propose a managerial or corporatist approach to policy making and market development, which excludes other stakeholders and leaves only industry and government as partners. The industry role is seen as planning, designing, owning, developing and operating networks and services. Evaluation of investment and development is to be based on economic variables alone. 'Success' is to meet the test of the market place, where only that which is profitable is available. In this view, the role of government policy is to pursue initiatives which favour a market driven agenda and competitive market place. However, the removal of government oversight from the market structure means that concentration of ownership and market power increases. As such, competition becomes a euphemism for increased dominance and a redividing of the existing, and new, market pie by a few large players. Those who currently dominate will continue to do so only with fewer barriers and restrictions, particularly with their expansion of market activities to previously uncommodified areas. Public regulation is diminished as market regulation replaces it. In future, this means that with our public networks there will be much less public involvement in oversight and decision making. In turn, this may reduce their ability to meet the full range of the public's economic and non-economic needs and to even address the failures of the provision of such services.

To address the concerns of the public at large, and in part to counter public interest group detractors, the agenda of self interest is subsumed by appeals to 'increased choice', consumer 'needs' response, the 'empowerment' of consumers to communicate, and the protection and enhancement of 'culture'. That all this is increasingly defined in narrow market terms, a choice between commodities, means that social and cultural content valued only by the profitability of its production is obfuscated.

This rhetoric suggests that only an inherently efficient market is able to achieve economic, social and cultural objectives. However, the inability of market forces to address or provide for not-for-profit national or local political, social, cultural communication and information or even for that matter, economic management, is ignored by both government decision makers and industry. Tipping the balance from a predominance of public regulation to that of market regulation, begs the question, is industry really prepared for this role? Does it have the ability to undertake these social and cultural duties and responsibilities? Given the imperative of economic goals and methods, one would think not (See, for example, Stentor:1993).<sup>8</sup>

Industry actors also raise the spectre that outside forces create an inevitable need for this particular type of change. Technological advancement, globalization, convergence, ostensibly all beyond the control of human kind or their governments, have lead to a crisis in the traditional way that society operates. The only solution in this market view of human kind and society is to redefine traditional social relations and decommodified activities and resources, which were built and perpetuated by social, cultural and political policy goals, to an economically defined approach. Stentor Telecom Policy's report, "Culture and the Information Highway" elucidates about this view,

The policy measures that have bolstered the broadcasting and cable industries; enabling them to carry out their social and cultural objectives, may not be sustain-



able in a free-trade environment. In response, these measures may have to give way to a more competitive model for the domestic market (Ellis, 1994:2).

## CLASS

There is a class dimension associated with the congruence between government and industry decision makers. Non-class issues are also involved in policy making, with this representation largely taking the form of new issue-based interest groups. This class matrix can be distinguished using criteria of political and economic power; a private property (market approach) as opposed to social values and a common property (mixed approach) predisposition; and position and importance in relation to others in the policy and regulatory processes.

Dominant class fractions include members of the information industry and inner circle decision makers in government. These interests favour the pro-market agenda (private property). Another part of the matrix is an information petit bourgeoisie, professionals working within the various information industry sectors, which tend to have split loyalties between self interested private property (labour relations and as producers) and the broader social and cultural (non-commodity) processes and relations. There is also a set of subordinate class actors. Traditional players in the policy process, consisting of unions and public interest groups, are generally driven by issues relating to economic and social justice (inequalities). Issue or ostensibly non-class interest groups are also involved in the policy process. One form, usually single issue oriented, has historically pursued social or cultural rights, for example information content. A new type of group, exhibiting post-modern values relating to individual differences and pluralistic notions of communities, tends to focus on alternative socio-political processes.

Within the structure of government, and in particular the departments charged with policy making on these issues (Indus-

try, Heritage, Finance, Treasury Board, Justice) there are competing visions between individuals, managers and sector branches on policy. These competing views are often underpinned with implicitly conflicting values about individual and collective property rights. However, in terms of final policy decision making, these power relations are unequal. Certain managers and sectors within the departments, an inner circle, (usually policy and regulatory branches) have the greatest influence and power over policy outcomes. This is usually in concert, but at times can be in conflict, with their political masters. With the current pro-market agenda there is a particular concordance of views between industry, these inner circle bureaucrats and the dominant politicians (e.g., Cabinet Ministers).

Interestingly, the schism between the views of these elites in government and many of their employees or colleagues closely resembles the schism in society at large between the expectations and values of the public and the elite decision makers of both government and the market. The public tends to seek a much more balanced set of social relations in general and information policy specifically than these elites. Recent studies have shown a growing class-based polarization over economic and social objectives between elites and the public at large. A recent report by Ekos Research Associates argues that there is "relative discontent with the narrow and unsuccessful pursuit of prosperity and competitiveness", a market agenda, and that this "neo-conservative agenda still seems to be a powerful force in the elite world of government and business" (1995a:20). In a comparison of twenty two values of elites/decision makers and the public, elites were most concerned with economic issues such as competitiveness, prosperity, minimal government and the like. The public's concerns were largely the inverse, focusing on collective and social values, including freedom, environment, health and equality (1995a:12). With regard to information, recent surveys by Ekos (1995b) and Compas (1995) on Canadian culture and information content (television, films, books, music, etc.) showed a

strong preference by the public for a diversity of content to meet social and cultural needs in addition to economic 'choice' options and, a desire for government intervention through policy and program support to meet these needs.<sup>9</sup> However, these views receive little play in current policy making.

The potential for a more equitable balance in policy making is further aggravated by the revolving door of employment between the senior levels of government and industry. The little lag time between assuming responsibilities from one employer to the next, and the fact that many of these elites move from a senior policy position in one sector, to a comparable position in the other, reinforces the shared ideology of these interests. For example, since the federal government shifted to a pro-market, neo-regulatory regime, seven senior individuals responsible for defining and implementing this government policy have since taken up the following private sector positions:<sup>10</sup>

Vice President - Regulation, Canadian Cable Television  
Association

President - Alliance Communications

Vice President - Regulatory Affairs, Stentor Telecom Policy  
Inc.

Vice President - MultiMedia, Bell Canada

Vice President - Bell Mobility

Vice President - Unitel Communications

President - Canadian Cable Television Association

Individuals from a number of government departments have moved to an industry player that is directly affected by (and often benefits from) the changes in regulation and policies. Similarly, those in senior levels of industry also move into senior policy or management positions in key communication policy setting departments. Those representing the public view are often excluded from this type of access to this inner circle. However, to counter the public 'flak' that tends to arise about insider decision making, both the CRTC and the federal government have undertaken public consultative initiatives—ostensibly pluralistic proceed-

ings which give equal time and opportunity for all players, including the public, to affect policy. The unequal resources the dominant corporations bring to these venues, and the weight attached by government to their representations as compared to public efforts, maintains rather than mediates the unequal power relations in policy making. The recent IHAC is instructive on the class dimension of this issue.

As shown in Chart One, of the thirty one IHAC council members, twenty represented the market whereas six represented the public interest. Twenty one of these participants (Information Industry, Cable, Telephone, Commercial Content, and Finance) represented dominant companies in the information field. With the recent industry restructuring, take-overs and the like, these companies also exhibit an increasing level of economic interdependency and cross-ownership relations. Three public institutional representatives on the IHAC straddled the public interest and market agendas. These three (education, health, library) increasingly rely on the market for the provision and delivery of their services. Of the six representing the public, one of these, the Consumers Association of Canada (1995), tended to represent the views of business by presuming that open competition would provide maximum consumer choice and that this would eventually result in social and cultural goals being achieved after a new market regime had been established.<sup>11</sup> Also disturbing about the IHAC process was that many of the council members had little formal training or broad experience in the areas of communication, policy and information. Much of the first half of their tenure was spent being briefed on the basics of policy and practises in these areas. Moreover, no small amount of time was spent by members representing specific industry's and companies fighting to protect their own interests.<sup>12</sup>

#### Chart One: IHAC COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

Information Technology Industry	9
Cable Television Industry	3



Telephone Industry	6
Commercial Content Industry	2
Finance Industry	1
Public Interest Organizations	6
Public Institutions	3
Labour	1
Chair	1

The inner circle of companies which consistently lobby policy makers behind the scenes and are represented in major policy fora including CRTC hearings is relatively small. They include the following:

### Chart Two: Regulatory Intervenors

Alberta Government Telephone  
 Allarcom (Pay-TV) \*  
 Canadian Association of Broadcasters  
 Canadian Business Telecommunication Alliance \*  
 Canadian Cable Television Association \*  
 Canadian Daily Newspapers Association  
 Canadian Federation of Ind. Business  
 Canadian Independent Telephone Association  
 Canadian Satellite Communication Inc.  
 Canadian Satellite Users Association  
 Competitive Telecommunication Assoc.  
 Director of Competition, Competition Bureau  
 Northwestel Inc. \*  
 Quebec-Tel  
 Government of Saskatchewan  
 Sprint Canada  
 Stentor Telecom Policy Inc. \*  
 Unitel Communications \*  
 Rogers Cable \*  
 Shaw Cable \*  
 Western International Communications \*  
 Information Technology Association of Canada

Those who were also represented on the IHAC directly or indirectly are asterisked.<sup>13</sup>

In comparison, the public interest groups who most consistently participate include the Federation Nationale du

Consommateurs du Quebec, the National Anti-Poverty Organization, the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, the Consumers' Association of Canada (national and provincial), the Telecommunications Workers Union and the Communication, Energy and Paper Workers Union of Canada.

This corporate representation in these policy/regulatory activities also correlates with their respective positions of dominance in the information industries in Canada. Through takeovers, mergers and alliances this industry is extremely concentrated and largely controlled by these interests. For example, in television, five companies reached 62 per cent of all Canadian viewers in 1993 (including Allarcom, Eaton's, Asper). Ten companies in this sector received 90 per cent of all revenues. In cable, three companies (Roger's, Videotron, Shaw) controlled 56 per cent of the market in 1994. In radio, ten companies controlled 55 per cent of all revenues (including Allarcom, Roger's, Shaw). In magazine publishing, 12 companies control 52 per cent of circulation. In book publishing in 1992 twenty one of 370 firms (6 per cent) controlled 51 per cent of total sales. With barriers between these traditional sectors removed by policy, the race now for these players is entry and dominance of the electronic market place for existing products and the extension of the market into private (home) and other traditionally non-market social and cultural activities and institutions (Winter and Hassanpour, 1994:10-17).

The Canadian Cable Television Association has defined these new market opportunities as the 'unclaimed territory' (CCTA, 1994:3,6). These types of services include electronically based information services, distance education, health, libraries, home shopping, E-mail, government information, games and entertainment, among others. This territory has been described as 'unclaimed' for two reasons. First, none of the existing companies have finished developing the networks and applications necessary to produce and distribute these products and the consumer market is still being developed. Secondly, none of the

existing companies have achieved market dominance in these services. Most of these commodities are intended to be accessed by individuals from the home.

## **PUBLIC CLAIMS, CLASS AND INTEREST GROUPS**

In addition to this agency in the dominant class fraction, subordinate class agency occurs both in more traditionally class-based group and new interest group forms. This agency is both reactive and oppositional (progressive) in relation to the unequal economic and political power of the domination information class. With both these segments of the subordinate class, the goal is shared; a struggle against these inequalities. However, the traditional groups, who tend to have developed some degree of class consciousness, react to economic inequalities (e.g., pricing, affordability). Those in the newer segment in contrast, have formed as interest groups and are less class aware, but argue for a more democratic structure and practise for an information society, a community or communities view, than do the traditional groups.

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While the traditional groups recognize the class nature of social relations, they have tended not to attempt to change them or offer a different vision for social relations, so much as argue for welfarist forms of redistribution to ensure access. Many in the new interest groups, in fact, argue implicitly for greater social control over decision making in the development and access to information networks and resources. It also is not coincidental that the new interest groups formed largely over concern about broad 'information content' issues, whereas the traditional groups formed over narrower economic issues relating to access to basic public communication infrastructure, or around narrower cultural content (e.g., broadcast policy). Both segments are elite led and have only recently started working together in coalitions around common policy goals. In the current policy changes, which are driven by a more entrenched bilateral government-industry corporatism, both types of groups are required to adopt

new approaches in influencing policy making than have been used in the past. This means they must pursue more aggressive behind the scenes lobbying in addition to formal, public interventions.

The traditional groups have generally taken one of two forms. One group, class-based, have represented low income or disadvantaged Canadians. Other interest-based groups have represented Canadians in general on the basis of shared cultural need, and regional disparities and claims. The first group includes the:

National Anti-Poverty Organization;  
Telecommunications Workers Union;  
Federation Nationales des Consommateurs du Quebec  
(FNACQ);  
Public Interest Advocacy Centre;  
Ontario Federation of Labour;  
British Columbia Public Interest Advocacy Centre;  
Communication, Energy and Paper Workers Union of  
Canada.

50 The claims made by these groups concern issues of affordability, availability and access to basic media (e.g., networks, books, etc.). The second grouping tends to focus on a specific need or issue important to a constituency, such as Canadian content or technical requirement. Members of this grouping include the:

Canadian Association of the Deaf;  
The Friends of Canadian Broadcasting;  
Television Northern Canada;  
The Canadian Conference of the Arts;  
Consumers Association of Canada;  
Canadian National Institute for the Blind;

A common thread linking both types of groups is that their claims on policy are centred around the public nature of communication and the need for Canadians to have access to be able to participate in society.

The dominant class sees information and communication as a strategic investment to develop innovative and widespread uses (widely distributed, and sold and resold) of new information based commodity products. The traditional public interest groups



see a duality to these services however. On the one hand, there exists a commercial component, as argued by the information companies. But at the same time, these groups argue that there is a public utility or public goods function. As such, access and use are "necessary for economic, social and cultural development, participation and integration for society at large" (Reddick, 1995:32). These groups argue that the current policy trend will create a society of information "have and have nots" based on the ability to pay, particularly given the need for companies to recover massive proposed investments. For example, the phone and telephone companies alone are planning investments of up to \$15 billion just for network upgrading.

The new interest groups have been formed by academic and professional elites who are generally associated with institutions involved with information and knowledge. These groups and their members (usually other elites or similar professional organizations rather than the general public) tend to be either early adopters of new technologies, or have been pushed into information society practises by their employers, or those financing them; often provincial governments. For example, most provincial governments have developed strategies of electronic information production, distribution and exchange of government services, education, library and health services. The new interest groups would include:

- The Coalition for Public Information;
- The Ontario Library Association;
- The Canadian Library Association;
- The Canadian Teachers Federation;
- Provincial Privacy and Information Commissioners;
- Telecommunities Canada (Freenets);
- Information Highway Working Group;
- Public Information Highway Advisory Council.

Some of these groups have been in existence for some time, such as the library associations. They and the others are considered 'new' because of their recent interest and activities involving

broad communication policy because that their previous or other activities or mandates were much less or not at all concerned with communications.

The claims of these groups focus less on economic issues of access or ownership in the industry, and instead, involve the need for *public space*, in addition to commercial space, in an information society and a diversity of information (social, cultural, political), in addition to commercial commodities. Interestingly, some also promote the development of a highly connected, high capacity 'information system' to all individuals, often embracing similar emancipatory utopian expectations to that of the market proponents of the Information Highway (Coalition for Public Information, 1995:1,2,4,5).

Some of these claims seem to be made without a clear understanding by some of these actors of the economic costs associated with such objectives or the proclivity of the market to actually invest or provide service to market segments (low income) or areas (rural) which offer little return on investment. Nonetheless, the claims these groups do make are a recognition that economic imperatives are an assault on 'public' information and the traditional public sphere. They also recognize that the market can not or will not meet these social, cultural and political needs.

Some groups, by uncritically embracing and promoting the mythical and utopian possibilities of the information society risk undermining the potential that they will achieve their end goals. As a result there is a shared discourse with economic actors that new technology can 'decentralize' society, link everybody, 'empower' citizens and groups, create electronic communities and so forth. But they lose sight of the fact that these occur within a wider, centralized and integrated privately financed and owned structure. Economic criteria still define what is a justified investment, what can be 'economically' provided. The increasing private control over information also sets the limits and terms of this decentralization which are not equal or designed for social

ends. The risk of a market driven approach is that electronic grids and information products and services will not be emancipatory. Moreover, public space and information resources will not be broadened and reflect social diversity, instead these become narrowed, eroded and filtered as they are commodified. Gorz calls this emerging network infrastructure, one that extends to the private and leisure activities of the home, "the glue of serial impotence" (Gorz, in Webster and Robins, 1986:322). In this view, people become a mass of linked, impotent consumers. These groups need to better define, articulate, develop strategies for, and adhere to their goals and ideas to avoid becoming complicit by default with the market agenda (Webster and Robins, 1986:321-23).

Other actors involved in these policy debates, which have had a fairly consistent level of representation are self employed professionals—an information petit bourgeoisie. These actors tend to have two major economic interests influencing their objectives in addition to cultural and social concerns. On the one hand, they have a stake or claim on information content or products as labourers on behalf of corporate producers. This set of relations they share in common with an increasing number of members of the subordinate class who are becoming information workers or where traditional work is being affected by the increased use of information technology in the production process. As well, many also have a claim as owners (producers) of information products. These are producers of information and information based works for both social/cultural (use) value, but also as much, if not more so, for their commodity/exchange value. This means that at times, there can be concordance or discordance with other public interest groups depending upon the particular policy issue at hand. Groups representing these actors at policy fora include:

The Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers in  
Canada;

Association of Canadian Television and Radio Artists



(ACTRA);

The Independent Film and Video Alliance;

The Writers Union of Canada.

The general public interest is represented in varying degrees by this constellation of unions and public interest groups, but often the public is not fully aware of the substantive policy and structural changes being implemented until these have already occurred. One can speculate on the reasons for this, but they probably include: failure of communication by their group representatives; low levels of interest; complexity of the issues; lack of availability of useful/informative information; under reporting or biased press coverage; and inattention by politicians, among others. In addition to these barriers, much of the decision making occurs behind the scenes, through lobbying, private studies, consultations with experts and dominant actors (capitalist class and subordinate class interest groups) both in private and in controlled access fora.

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Recently, a number of the traditional and new public interest groups have started working in broader alliances. For example, the coalition People for Affordable Telephone Service (PATs) was formed by over 60 organizations representing 10 million Canadians (PIAC, 1995:1). This is not a formal organization but a number of groups who share a common interest around one issue—telephone service. Being a single issue coalition, it has been relatively easy for the group to achieve consensus over common objectives on policy. The objectives deal with the availability and affordability of basic telephone service.

Another public coalition, the Alliance for a Connected Canada (ACC), was formed to deal with both basic technical access, information content and employment issues (Brehl, 1995:B3). This coalition links traditional and new public interest groups on a cross-sectoral basis as a tactic to strategically give these interests more *political* clout on policy decision makers. Strategically, the ACC is also a means to create a democratic process for forming consensus and action around core issues. In



particular, they are focusing on inequalities relating to access (affordability), content development and diversity (non-commercial social, political and cultural needs) and quality and abundant levels of employment. The strategists of this alliance are largely academics or experts in the field of communications mirroring Gramsci's conception of counter-organic intellectuals. They are attempting to create an oppositional (ideological) praxis to counter the attempted hegemonic shift desired by the dominant 'information' class. This is very much a response to the class-based, market inequalities of the information society which are emerging out of pre-existing class-based structural inequalities.

Members of this alliance by the summer of 1996 included the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, the Telecommunications Workers Union, the Communication, Electrical and Paperworkers Union, the Council of Canadians, Telecommunities Canada, the Coalition for Public Information, the Fédération nationales des associations des consommateurs du Québec (FNACQ), the National Library of Canada, the Information Highway Working Group, the McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology, the Canadian Library Association, the Canadian Teachers Federation, the Assembly of First Nations, and the Association pour l'avancement des sciences et des techniques de la documentation (ASTED).

Groups such as PIAC and the TWU also represent traditional class-based groups such as low income Canadians and telecommunication workers. The cross-sectoral nature of this coalition was a strategic choice on the part of these groups, in part to counter government's current strategy of categorizing particular consumer groups in the pejorative as 'special interests'. Forming a broader constituency has generated some concern and attention by policy makers because as a coalition these groups have much more political clout and media impact. This concern has arisen because the group is politicizing policy awareness and extending debate to include a broader set of 'ordinary' Canadians through their representative organizations who have not been

centrally involved in information or communication policy (Brehl, 1995:B3).

## GOVERNMENT MANAGERIALISM AND POLICY

56 The federal government's strategy in policy making and approach and response to public interest groups and the information class is based on the managerial or corporatist model. The corporatist strategy with respect to the 'public' generally takes two forms. On the one hand, as discussed above, many groups or interests are included in the traditional 'pluralist' policy fora. While this affords some influence on policy by the public, such processes have little real impact on policy. Instead, these processes tend to neutralize public opposition by permitting this form of expression and interaction. For those groups who exhibit more political effectivity on issues—more of a challenge to the ideology and agenda of government and its corporate allies—these groups are either marginalized or brought into the corporatist arrangement under terms set by government. This is not to say that they are equal partners in some tripartite managerial set of relations. Even if this were so, the relations themselves would still be undemocratic by the wider exclusion of individual participation by the public and the other representative groups. Instead, these 'included' groups are more like 'junior partners' with no real ability to change the overall policy agenda. If it were a baseball game, these groups have moved from the bleachers to the dug-out, but they still aren't on the field or calling the shots to the real players. Occasionally, minor policy or regulatory concessions are made to continue their participation or appease substantive opposition which generates around specific policy issues. For example, the federal government recently ordered massive telephone rate increases. In an attempt to dispel opposition from public interest groups, the government promised to establish through regulation a Lifeline program and similar affordability options for low income Canadians (Brehl and McCarthy, 1995:B1).

There is however, a price to be paid by groups to be included

closer to the centre of this form of back room decision making. These groups must devise a strategy to achieve some of their goals within the rules and discourse set by government. Current policy frames issues in the context of an 'information market place'. For example, Industry Canada told one of the groups mentioned above that with respect to 'consumer policy':

Globalization and technological change have changed the dynamic of the market place. This market place is increasingly consumer driven. Consumer power and judgement, consumer acceptance of products and feedback dictate to companies now. Consumers have a stake and role in the economy. In this new economy we want nimble producers and, as well, we need nimble consumers. The focus of Industry Canada is on the market place now. The challenge is to get this framework right. We need an efficient, competitive market and as a result we will end up with quality products and consumer choice. The premise for this policy is to make sure that the market works. The new consumer policy paradigm is that the government will intervene as an exception not as the rule where there is market failure. The goal is to get the market and competition working right.<sup>14</sup>

The inclusion of public interests, organizations or academics is based on their limiting their criticism of government policy to the details of its implementation, instead of the overall policy direction at large. Groups are also required to adopt some of the discourse of this policy agenda—essentially agreeing to a narrowing of debate to conform to the economic imperatives underlying policy. For example, Industry Canada has dictated that the new discourse with respect to the public or consumer is that citizens are now only consumers operating in an information market place. Interest groups are expected to adopt this stipulated discourse and policy agenda. To be critical or oppositional



risks marginalization or exclusion. The words 'class', 'have and have not', 'vulnerable consumer', 'poor' and the like are to be replaced by the generic catch all term, *market failure*. In this view, the devil is not the overall policy or ideology, but in the details of its implementation and practise. 'Dysfunction' becomes an aberration in the ideal market, where there are no losers.<sup>15</sup>

The potential for co-opting and neutralizing the most effective public interests through such a process is great, particularly where any substantial part of a group's funding comes from government. Dominelli and Hoogvelt, writing on how the U.K. government has refined a similar strategy, remind us of Foucault's warnings of the dangers of conforming to the duality of discourse and practise. Foucault says that through both,

the individual and the group gradually become drawn into a new world of lived experience that gradually detaches them from their own critical consciousness, ideology or value commitments (M. Foucault, in Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1995:20).

Where public interest groups or experts produce information/research for government as part of these relations, Dominelli and Hoogvelt have labelled this structural relationship and power over, by government, to public agency as 'contract government'. This is the corporatist state's response to the "differing goals of agents from the policy goals of government" (Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1995:10). The authors describe this as a key component in the process of commodification and marketization of information and knowledge. In this process, "the tool for controlling manual workers is being used as an instrument for reorganizing mental labour" (Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1995:11). With commodification, the product of this labour, information, is commodified. This strategy is based on making "the agents interests the same as government, structuring, monitoring, and controlling each stage of the information/research process" (Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1995:11). I would also add, it controls



the degree of access the groups have to decision makers and the weight given to their views on policy.

## CONCLUSION

Recent surveys suggest that for the majority of Canadians there may not be strong demand for new information commodities. Statistics Canada analysis on the income of Canadians has found that there has been a consistent decline in income levels and disposable income over the past several years. With persistent public and private sector employment cuts, the scarcity of new 'good' jobs, and the tendency for new jobs to be in the lower wage service industries, this trend is not expected to change for some time (Statistics Canada, 1993). This means that it is unlikely that there will be strong mass demand for the very commodities that industry is relying on to build the information society.

Affordability and class challenges to participation in an information society are also supported by a recent study conducted by Ekos Research Associates. In constructing a model or typology of the socio-economic grouping of Canadians, this study, *Rethinking Government*, found that 41 per cent of Canadians were "economically distressed" and another 16 per cent forming part of the middle class were "economically insecure" (1995a: 90-95). Of the remainder, 24 per cent of Canadians formed the "secure" middle class and 19 per cent belonged to the "insiders". The insider or high social class represents upwardly mobile, high income Canadians. This group correlates with the initial target market identified by information companies for their new information products—the communication intensive household. There is less certainty about the economic ability of the 40 per cent of Canadians in the middle class and, in particular, the 41 per cent in the lower social class to fully participate in this society beyond a minimal level.

What this means is that in the emerging class-based information society, many Canadians who lack sufficient economic resources or live in areas of Canada where it is not economically

viable or profitable enough to provide service, will be largely excluded from participating in economic, social and cultural information resources. The 'have and have not' bifurcation in Canada based on such factors as income, education, geographic location and so forth, will also exist in communication and information.

This outcome is not inevitable, however. Participation by the public in policy making can have some affect on the development of our communication/information society. As well, the above trends also mean that a fundamental contradiction is emerging whereby a required mass of individuals with sufficient disposable income necessary for the successful development of an information society as envisioned by its proponents may not be realized. If so, what will develop in its place? Will this meet the varied needs of society or be a limited service only available to an information caste?

Current government policy making and market decision making over the development and availability of information resources amounts to little more than ideology on the part of government that an information market place will exorcise us from economic stagnation, and on the part of dominant companies that they will realize private gain. The current economically-based 'Inquisition' of our long developed social and cultural policies and practises are an assault on our moral, ethical and democratic goals. This is all done in the name of a new market doctrine. This market-like religion conveys a powerlessness about ourselves as individuals, as a broader citizenry, and our democratic national institutions and polity. The God of the market is not new. In Greek mythology he was called Hermes or Mercury. The Greeks mainly knew him as the 'God of Commerce and the Market', but he was also called the 'Master Thief' (Hamilton, 1942:34).<sup>16</sup>

If the information society is to be democratic, that of 'for the people', then limits must exist on the processes of commodification and marketization. As Macpherson argues above, property rights

must balance social interests and permit full individual development and participation in social, cultural and economic processes and activities in society. These must be valued based on their own criteria (morality, ethics, economic justice) not by economic essentialism alone. The fundamental democratic individual property right to freedom of which Macpherson speaks must include the right not be excluded from participation and access to communication and diverse information resources. Information and knowledge in the broadest sense must be recognized as fundamental to being human, for existence as social beings, and to being democratic as a society. These goals also require that the public be more included in the decision making process about the development and availability of these resources and services.. Those alone vested through enfranchisement with the right and responsibility of governing should guide debate and decision making. At issue is whether we are to be a society within 'commerce' or whether 'commerce' should be subsumed *within society*.

## NOTES

1. For helpful commentaries on an earlier version of this paper, I wish to thank Wallace Clement, John Harp, Vanda Rideout and Michael Janigan.
2. The federal communication sector includes broadcasting, telecommunications, intellectual property and copyright, national libraries, data protection, privacy, access to information, trade and competition policy.
3. In this paper the term information includes knowledge.
4. See Resnick, S. and Wolfe, R. 1987 *Class and Knowledge*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 2,3,5,24,52 for a discussion on the process of over determination or social interdependency.
5. Zuboff has written about using information technology to informate individuals. In other words, the use of technology to create new information and, at the same time, increase the skill and knowledge levels of individuals as workers and citizens. See Zuboff, S. 1988 *In the Age of the Smart Machine*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., pp. 9-10.
6. Neo-liberal is defined as a current mix of contemporary liberal and

conservative ideologies which together advocate reduced state power and a lesser role for government in society, and an increased reliance on market forces, competition and individualism. See for example, B. Clark, 1991 *Political Economy: A Comparative Approach*. New York: Praeger, pp.83,97,119.

7. See for instance the submission by the Canadian Cable Television Association to Order-In-Council P.C. 1994-1689.

8. See for example, "The Information Highway: Canada's Road to Economic and Social Renewal, A Vision Statement", Stentor Telecom Policy Inc., Oct. 1993.

9. "Canadians' Attitudes Toward Broadcast Issues", Compas Survey, Sept. 1995; "Staging the Future", Ekos Research Associates Inc. for Human Resources Development Canada, January, 1995b.

10. Most of these came from the CRTC.

11. See for example, the Consumer Association of Canada submission to Public Notice CRTC 1994-130 for comments on Order-In-Council P.C. 1994-1689.

12. The author was a policy advisor in Industry Canada during this period and interacted with the Council on a number of occasions on policy matters.

13. See for example the list of Parties for such hearings as CRTC 1994-130 (1994b); Telecom Decision CRTC 92-12 (1992); Telecom Decision CRTC 94-19 (1994a); Telecom Decision CRTC 95-21 (1995).

14. The author was a participant at this meeting representing a public interest group in December, 1995.

15. The author was a participant at this meeting representing a public interest group, November, 1995.

16. It is interesting to note that the dominant telephone companies in Canada call their national lobbying group Stentor Telecom Policy Inc.. In Greek mythology, Stentor was a herald with a powerful voice who died after losing a shouting contest with Hermes (Collins, 1994:1133).

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# Language, Power, and Politics: Revisiting the Symbolic Challenge of Movements<sup>1</sup>

*Dominique Masson  
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There certainly has been a sea change in social movement theory since McCarthy and Zald (1977) bluntly dismissed the symbolic dimension of movement activity from the establishment of the Resource Mobilization (RM) paradigm. Reducing movements' symbolic constructs to grievances and treating these as only marginal components of collective action has become indefensible today. 'Neo' resource mobilizationists, New Social Movement (NSM) theorists and political scientists all converge now to give greater weight to movements' subjective constructions in theorizing social movement activity. Internal controversies and debates spawned by an increased recognition of the limitations of the RM model<sup>2</sup> have led theorists to reappraise the role of solidarities, movement goals and cognitive frameworks in movement mobilization. The emergence of the New Social Movements approach as a contending paradigm in the field, granting a central status to the cultural and the symbolic (see Cohen, 1983, 1985; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Touraine, 1988; Melucci, 1989) has redirected attention toward the production by movements of 'alternative meanings,' such as new identities, cultural innovations, and oppositional discourses. Political scientists, for their part, have noticeably shifted their treatment of symbolic issues away from 'the history of ideas' and into the terms of representational, democratic, and identity politics (see for example Young, 1990; Jenson, 1989, 1993; Dalton and Kuechler, 1990). As questions previously subsumed under the

appellation of 'ideology' and relegated to a secondary plane of explanation have come to the forefront, scholars in social movements studies are insistently called on to pay more attention to the symbolic dimension of collective action.

Yet, for all the talk about discursive hegemonies and identities, interpretive frames and other "fightin' words" (Johnston, 1992), social movement theory has tended to by-pass the analysis of the specifics of movements meanings—or, paraphrasing Starn (1992:96), the social semiotics of protest. Also crucially lacking is a clear understanding of how these symbolic constructs operate within the social struggles in which movements are engaged. How are we to describe movements' symbolic constructions and how are we to trace the processes through which they are produced and changed historically (Escobar and Alvarez, 1992:6)? And maybe more importantly, how are we to analyse their workings and consequences in a field of power relations and struggles? These are all questions that ought to be asked if we are to understand, as is increasingly contended, 'the symbolic' as an intrinsic dimension of the exercise of power, and of struggle over power (Alvarez and Escobar, 1992; Slater, 1994; Jenson, 1989; Melucci, 1989).

68 Dissatisfaction with the sparse theoretical and methodological apparatuses available to pursue this inquiry has sent social movement scholars in search of more precise, or more adequate frameworks. Recent suggestions include drawing from ethnography and ethnosemiotics (Escobar, 1992; Starn, 1992), sociology of everyday life (Escobar, 1992), postmodern and poststructuralist analyses of discourses and subjectivities (Slater, 1994; Starn, 1992), ethnomethodology and American sociolinguistics (Johnston, 1991, 1992; Donati, 1992; Larana, 1994). The present article is part of this quest. It endeavors to contribute to the current re-evaluation of the role played by interpretations and representations in movement activity, strategy, and politics by bringing to bear on social movement theory some propositions developed within a European tradition<sup>3</sup> of language studies, and

in particular by scholars identified with critical perspectives on language and discourse.

If we are, as I will argue, to take the notion of the symbolic challenge of movements seriously, we have to revisit this challenge not only as a truly political struggle, but as a political struggle of a special sort. That is, as one which is fought, characteristically, over the modalities in which power relations are embedded and enacted through social systems of signs and meanings. To do so, we have to understand why the specifics of the language in which movement representations are couched should be considered, what exactly is at stake in the 'symbolic struggles, in which movements are involved, and how this goes beyond contests over 'meanings,' 'naming,' and 'framing.'

Some of the answers to these questions can be found in social movement theory's attempts to deal with movements' symbolic activity. The most influential frameworks from a NSM perspective are those of Melucci (1989) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985). In RM theory, the 'collective action frames' approach prevails and is responsible for a fast growing body of literature. A critical assessment of these frameworks is the object of the first section of this article. The second section explores some of the avenues through which European approaches to language and discourse can help further our understanding of language as a distinct level of analysis. Language, it will be argued, operates as a power-laden mode of action that has direct consequences for social relations and for movement politics.

This article advocates the need for a more linguistically-sensitive, empirically-grounded, and politically-oriented analysis than has heretofore been the case in social movement studies. In doing so, it echoes the voices that currently call for a closer and rigorous scrutiny of the role of 'the symbolic' in movements' practices and struggles.



## SYMBOLIC CHALLENGE AND SYMBOLIC POLITICS IN SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

### Challenging Codes, Challenging Power: Alberto Melucci

We owe to Melucci the first formulation of "the symbolic challenge" of movements. Melucci's notion of symbolic challenge is linked to his conception of power in today's societies. Melucci (1989:45) argues that we live in "complex societies" characterized by a heightened capacity to produce signs and social meanings. Complex societies are also characterized by a pronounced social differentiation that sets greater needs for integration and control. Integration and control are exerted through signs and meanings, as these are expressed, according to Melucci, in the form of societal norms, standardized codes, and of formal frameworks of administrative and technological knowledge. Indeed Melucci's argument (1989:76-77) goes further: power in complex societies *is* "signs," power is transformed and concealed within sets of signs that codify and regulate social relations.

Actors mobilize to regain hold of the meanings and conditions of their action against complex societies' always expanding and increasingly anonymous forms of power. Individuals and groups mount what is termed by Melucci a symbolic challenge to the dominant codes, norms, identities and other "sets of signs" that regulate social life. This symbolic challenge encompasses two main aspects. The first is the production of alternative frameworks of knowledge and meaning in the process of collective action. The second is the experimentation of new ways of living and new forms of relationships in the daily practice of movements' "submerged networks." Moreover, the very existence of the movements is considered a symbolic confrontation with the technological rationality of the system (Melucci, 1989:60). This because movements themselves become "signs": the living proof, so to speak, that social change and alternative interpreta-



tions of society are possible.

By throwing into light the arbitrariness of complex societies' cultural modes of regulation, movements' symbolic challenge renders visible the power inscribed in these (Melucci, 1989:76-77). Melucci's fundamental contribution lies precisely in this notion that signs and social meanings are part of the ways power is exerted and, consequently, are also part of the ways power can be, and is contested. Signs, meanings and power are, it is suggested, intimately intertwined. In Melucci's argument, the symbolic ceases to be merely a portrait, a mirror of the social order to become implicated in society's very ordering. Movements' attempts at reinterpreting and challenging dominant "codes" by proposing "a different way of perceiving and naming the world" (Melucci, 1989:75) are to be considered, in this sense, attempts at altering not only the "symbolic" order of society, but the social order itself.

Although very insightful, Melucci's conception of movements' symbolic challenge is problematic, however, regarding the interface of 'signs' and power, of the symbolic and the political. Three important problems can be underlined. Firstly, as Bartholomew and Mayer (1992) have remarked, Melucci's notion of power is too unspecified. Crucially missing is an understanding of the grounding of movements' symbolic challenge in the fractured field of unequal power relations between people and groups of people. How particular hierarchies and forms of power relations operate—and are contested—*via* signs and meanings lingers as the theoretical and empirical question to be answered. Secondly, the symbolic challenge of movements has to be reinstated within a broader vision of the political. Melucci's too narrow understanding of politics as state-based and his erroneous view of collective action as located mostly outside politics have been criticized as unduly bounding movements to cultural venues and to civil society issues. Finally, another important problem is that movements' symbolic challenges remain enacted in an essentially *expressive* manner. The existence of movements and the

experiential "practice [of] the alternative meanings of everyday life" (Melucci, 1989:71) are limited to *signal* ("announce," "publicize") an opposition which, within an immanent and disembodied version of power relations, is never otherwise played out.

In contrast, I contend that as a challenge to power relations, the symbolic dimension of movement activity should rather be analyzed as an intrinsic part of movement politics. That is, as part of the struggles over power in which concrete actors are engaged in the variety of social sites where unequal power relations are at play. In addition, I suggest that understanding movements' symbolic challenge as being—partly<sup>4</sup>—a 'politics of signs and meanings' directs us towards the semiotic<sup>5</sup> aspects of this challenge. One of the main avenues to reconceptualizing and to investigating 'the symbolic challenge of movements' is, I will argue, to analyse this challenge as a struggle whose domain is linguistic and discursive practices, and whose stake is the power relations built into them.

### **Laclau and Mouffe's Discursive Politics: The Symbolic As Contingent**

In this perspective, Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) conception of "struggles for hegemony" throws more light on the notion of movements' symbolic challenge in terms of discursive politics. The authors strongly assert the political character of symbolic struggles. Laclau and Mouffe draw on postmodern claims that place "discourse" at the origin of the constitution of the subjects, objects, and relationships of the social. Struggles over discourse, or more largely over the definition of the meanings we attach to lived social relations, thus occupy the very center of social conflictuality.

Laclau and Mouffe argue that social relations of power have no set meanings outside of the discourses that enable us to make sense of them. Social antagonisms, they contend, are polysemic. They can bear as many different significations (i.e., meanings) as there are discourses to constitute them. Whatever significations

do get fixed are so within discursive struggles for hegemony. That is, within struggles for the political imposition of constructed significations. The authors firmly state that neither the collective identities of the political subjects, nor their projects, issues or interests are pre-given. Rather, these are all contingent: they are not determined in advance by the social structure, but they vary as a result of the discursive struggles for the hegemonic fixation of social meanings.

This fixation is always partial and tentative. Concretely, the attempts to "effect closure" on significations is realized, according to Laclau and Mouffe, through a process of "articulation." In this process, dissimilar elements are linked through discursive strategies that establish among them what the authors call "chains of equivalence." Through these chains some discursive elements become substituable. They are also placed in a relation of difference or opposition with regard to other discursive chains. It is through such mechanisms, Laclau and Mouffe argue (1985:62-65), that identities such as "the people," or "the working-class" have become tentatively fixed among the various and intersecting subject positions that are occupied simultaneously by any individual. Similar sequencing operations offer the potential to transfer, or to "displace" meanings made historically available, they argue, by the liberal-democratic discourse to new areas which they re-signify and politicize (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:154-171). The notions of hegemonic struggle, articulations and discursive "chains of equivalences" can be useful, as the authors suggest, in tracing the constitution of coalitional politics and the emergence of new issues.

More importantly maybe, Laclau and Mouffe's claim about the contingency of symbolic constructions should be taken on board by social movement studies. It is worth underlining that, despite its definitively poststructuralist flavor, the view that identities, interests, and political projects are contingent rather than ascribed is also compatible with more fluid versions of contemporary Marxism. In this case, the notion that there exist



structural limits to discursive constructions is to be retained. Such limits include the weight of the past, the balance of forces, and the nature of the unequal relations of power at play (Jenson, 1989:75). To these I would add: the availability of existing meanings to signify and re-signify, which is also constrained, and constraining. The combination of these factors have as a result that not all discursive constructions are possible.

Acknowledging the contingent character of the symbolic dimension of collective action has important implications. The definition of identities—the ‘self-naming’ of movements—is increasingly acquiring an explanatory status in social movement theory (see Melucci, 1989; McClurg-Mueller, 1992; Buechler, 1993; Jenson, 1993). Yet, if the lived experiences of the social subjects are criss-crossed by different types of power relations, the identity of a political actor—a movement—cannot be seen as following directly from the social structure. Heterogeneous, rather than unified subjects become politically assembled under the label of a movement’s name. Peasant movements for example, Starn (1992:93) argues, are not a “cut-and-dried affair of class mobilization.” Rather, who qualifies as “peasant” in a given peasant movement varies and shifts according to an internal process of political hegemony<sup>6</sup> where “negotiation, choice, and imposition” are intertwined (Starn, 1992:96).

Seemingly similar political identities—such as ‘native peoples,’ ‘women,’ or even ‘workers’—are not defined the same way in different times and places, and within movements. Criteria for inclusion and exclusion differ. We need to know the more precise terms under which a movement’s ‘name’ is defined and the meanings attached to it if identities are to be in any way explanatory of movements’ goals, strategies, access to the political opportunity structure, and the like.

In this perspective, it also has to be stressed that the construction of interests and political projects cannot be seen as flowing directly from the choice of an identity, or a name. If movements indeed construct claims and interests “in accordance



with the logic of [their] name," as Jenson (1993:343) contends, this very "logic" is itself discursively and diversely constructed. Contemporary feminist works, for instance, have clearly asserted the diversity of 'women's' experiences. This diversity translates into diverse logics, thus giving rise to the political expression of widely diverse 'women's interests'<sup>7</sup> within largely heterogeneous, fragmented, and multi-form 'women's movements.'

Moreover, as Laclau and Mouffe (1985:168-169) point out, interests and projects are susceptible to being articulated within and to widely different discourses, with divergent or even contradictory implications in terms of the direction of struggles. As contingency and multiplicity of possible discursive articulations combine, movement politics acquire a more ambiguous outlook. Most movement initiatives, Starn (1992:95) aptly remarks, "defy neat categorization as hegemonic or counterhegemonic." The meaning of "democratic struggles" fluctuates in the context of complex, historically specific imaginaries and is contested amid contending discourses (Slater, 1994). Contingency means that movements' symbolic dimension bears no external guarantees. A closer examination of movements' discursive constructions is thus in order.

Yet, Laclau and Mouffe's framework is not readily applicable to the task. Relying heavily on some of the recent developments in postmodern and poststructuralist theory, Laclau and Mouffe's proposition suffers from similar ailments, in particular a too abstract approach to 'discourse' (Poynton, 1993). Consequently their work has been conducive only to an impressionistic view of the way different discourses and meanings jostle, merge, yield or win, in the "struggles for hegemony."

Unspecified and detached from the concrete modalities through which they are socially realized, discourses in this version appear utterly disembodied from the materiality of the linguistic means that express them. They are also delinked from the institutional locations and the social activity that permit their existence and that found their effectivity. Despite the acknowl-

edgment that discourses find their realization, in great part, through language, detailed accounts of actual processes of meaning-construction in linguistic forms are eschewed by Laclau and Mouffe. Therefore, they do not have much to offer, beyond "chains of equivalence" set at the level of the overarching themes of "equality," "difference," "justice" and "liberty," to probe into the specifics of the partial fixation of social meanings.

Furthermore, the notion that the positions, relations and other regularities of meanings constituting discourses need to be actively enacted to take effect is lost from sight. Discourses are not omnipotent nor agentless. Rather, they draw their authority and social efficacy only from the repeated utterance or performance of their elements by people speaking from particular socio-enunciative positions or institutions inscribed within a field of power relations. The argument that the subjects are also 'constituted in/by discourses' should not detract from concerns for agency and its exercise. This involves analysing the level of the written and spoken symbolic production by and through which concrete agents reproduce, struggle over and alter the terms of discourses in specific institutional, political, and strategic contexts.

### **Resource Mobilization Theory and The Framing of Collective Action**

The reappraisal of the importance of social meanings under the labels of "social constructivism" or of a re-vamped "new social psychology" approach has led a whole body of RM scholars to stress the role of social movement organizations (SMOs) in appropriating cultural symbols and in constructing schematas of interpretation in a way that can be made relevant for the mobilization of people, opinion, and resources. Sparked by Snow et al.'s (1986) reformulation of Goffman's concept of "frame" the recent works on framing share the assumption that meanings are constructed (Tarrow, 1994:119). Not only do people behave in accordance with a perceived reality but these perceptions are the

locus of a variety of interpretations. Proposing selective interpretations of social reality and gaining support for these then becomes a crucial task for movement organizations (see also Klandermans, 1988, 1989).

Collective action frames are complex ensembles of constructed meanings assigned to events, individual and collective experiences, and social situations. They are generally seen to include problem identification and system attributions, the definition of solutions and strategies, as well as a rationale for participation (Benford, 1993:199). McCarthy's (1994) "Drunk Driving frame" and "Auto-Safety frame" are closer to the understanding of frames as ensembles of 'problem attribution/solution identification' templates. Other versions of 'frames' have more affinity with the loose utilisation of the term "discourse": either pointing to distinctive ways of using language (of saying things) from particular socio-enunciative positions (Radical Feminist frame and Student Left frame in McAdam, 1994), or to styles and rules for making claims appropriate to particular institutional sites (Equal Opportunity frame and Rights frame in Tarrow, 1994).

Making SMO's frames congruent with prospective participants' (or interlocutors') frames is the object of deliberate "frame alignment" efforts by movement organizations. These attempts may even go as far as transforming significantly the initial frame in the course of collective action (Snow and al., 1986). The relational character of framing activity has to be underscored here. The positionality of the actor (the frame producer) and of the target audience (be it supporters or state agencies) and the immediate context of their interaction all play a role in constraining or foregrounding specific elements of the symbolic repertoire of protest that can be drawn upon (see Tarrow, 1994). Although frames are constructed at the organizational level, they can also be diffused within and among movements, in the latter case constituting a "master frame" that makes sense of reality and organizes collective action for a whole generation of activists



(Tarrow, 1994; McAdam, 1994).

The main interest of the current work on 'frames' and 'framing' resides in its constructivist perspective, and more precisely on its concern for the *strategic* dimension of meaning-making practices at the meso-level of movement organizations. Deliberate and sometimes shrewd crafting of symbolic constructs to "resonate" with an audience is indeed an integral part of SMO's action (see Benford, 1993:202), as the case of Greenpeace's watery-eyed baby seals eloquently illustrates. The purposeful 'framing' of progressive projects within the—usually much less progressive—'language of funding agencies,' a familiar practice within Québec popular movement organizations, is another example of obvious manipulation of messages for strategic ends. These types of strategic issues in symbolic politics NSM-related works typically do not address.

Empirical studies of frames, however, are too often diverted towards, and reduced to a strictly rhetorical view of movement meanings. The focus rests on the "persuasive communication techniques" whereby coldly calculating movement "entrepreneurs" (Tarrow, 1994) design or manipulate (Donati, 1992; Benford, 1987) symbols, metaphors and interpretive frames as "tools for detaching people from their habitual passivity" and for "transforming quiescence into collective action" (Tarrow, 1992:191). Frames then appear as customized, highly negotiable products, launched on a free-market of ideas to attract reluctant individuals.

Yet, if frames indeed display rhetorical and negotiable aspects, framing practices are also shaped by the wider social processes, structures, and relations of power from which they participate. And this occurs in ways that more often than not remain opaque to movement activists. The hegemony of dominant ways of signifying social relations, for example, or the prevalence of certain institutional discourses (i.e., the discourse of rights—see Tarrow, 1994:129-130), or movements' symbolic constructions of a higher order such as movement identities (the



'logic of the name') should all be brought to bear in explaining why certain frames are adopted, why they 'resonate' or not, succeed or not, or why they are produced at all.

The framing literature also tends to focus on mobilizational imperatives to the detriment of movements' social attempts at socio-political change as these are fought for in the arenas of the state and civil society. The political success of the 'reframing,' within the Canadian women's movement, of the abortion issue in terms of "women's freedom of choice" rather than as "free abortion on demand" makes a case for the relevance of a strategic-instrumental analysis of protest meanings (see Brodie, Gavignan and Jenson, 1992). In this example as in others however, it must also be stressed that the institutionalization of particular claims and ways of framing claims has very real, material consequences, as Mayer suggests (1991:469).

The consequences of specific framings have to be assessed as part of a more politically-oriented analysis of frames. This would require furthering Tarrow's hint (1992:196) about "actionable symbols" and McAdam, McCarthy and Zald's acknowledgement (1988:727-728) that "meanings are acted upon" in ways that have implications for movement action, the political system, and the daily life of people. Also required would be a detailed, discursive analysis of the language of frames—and of "counterframes." Such an analysis is still an exception in the field (c.f., Johnston, 1991). RM scholars' treatment of frames too often limits itself to identifying 'frames' without exposing much of their content or the implication of their institutionalization.

## **LANGUAGE-AS-ACTION:**

### **A SOCIOLINGUISTIC CONTRIBUTION**

As we can appreciate from the previous section, the three main frameworks developed within social movement theory for grappling with the symbolic dimension of movement activity all take as their starting point the assumption that meanings are socially

constructed and the object of contention. They also all throw light, albeit differently, on the stakes of movements' struggles in the field of social significations.

At issue through movement actors' contests over "culture" and cultural symbols are, following Melucci's insight, the modalities and directions in which power is exercised, and the very constitution of the social order. Laclau and Mouffe's important contribution points more directly to the centrality of the discursive realm and of struggles over discursive articulations in constructing not only "social meanings," but social reality itself. Hegemonic and 'oppositional' definitions of social antagonisms, collective identities, and political projects, in particular, thus become problematized as highly contingent. Finally, Resource Mobilization's work on "framing" focuses on the strategic-instrumental use of meaning construction by movement organizations, and briefly hints at the link between 'meanings' and action.

Furthering these frameworks, I have argued in various ways, requires a closer examination of the specifics of the symbolic politics in which movements are involved. More specifically, I have suggested that such an endeavour calls for an inquiry into the language<sup>8</sup> in which particular forms of power are coded, inscribed—tentatively fixed—and contested in the variety of social sites where power relations are at play. This inquiry is imperative not only to account for the variability, ambiguity, and open-endedness of the ways movement politics develop and unfold, but because language itself possesses its own effectiveness within social relations and, thus, "merits its own level of analysis" (Weir, 1995:52).

The theoretical propositions on which are premised critical approaches to discourse analysis, among which can be included the influential views of French social theorists Bourdieu (1991) and Foucault (1984)<sup>9</sup>, stress the particular "effectiveness" of language. In this they can contribute, as I will try now to show, to ground more solidly and to advance some of the main theoreti-

cal issues raised so far, to a different extent, by social movement theorists. These issues can be summed up as: the link between language and power, the constitutive dimension of meaning construction, and the consequential character of language for movements' political action.

Drawing on critical approaches to discourse analysis, I will present a conception of language as a mode of action in its double dimension of linguistic practice (the practice of making meaning through 'texts'<sup>10</sup>) and of discursive practice (the enunciation of these texts as a social 'event'). First, I will propose that we see language as a material mediation, embedding and enacting social relations of power, and whereby what we call 'social reality' is—partially, at the very least<sup>11</sup>—constituted, reconstituted, and potentially altered. Second, I will suggest to further the notion of language-as-action as it can be brought to bear on movement politics, underlining some of the ways in which political actors' discursive practices "do things with language," in particular through the power of "performatives" and the "actionable" character of authorized language. Finally, building on Foucauldian insights, I will argue that language-as-action is bounded by social "effects of closure," limiting the possibilities to signify and to act on social reality. This closure is an important part of what is contested through movements' linguistic and discursive practices.

### **Language: From 'Representing' to 'Making' The World**

Constructed meanings and interpretations do not hover above people in an ethereal world of ideas, as classical or idealistic versions would have it. Nor are they encapsulated in the cognitive structures of the mind (Lemke, 1990:192-194) as many RM theorists suggest. Rather, as critical discourse analysts claim, they exist in the material form of semiotic practices, one of these being language use in the form of written and spoken utterances. Language is not a clear window on the world, but a material mediation through which 'reality' is socially constituted and



enacted. Standing between human beings and the world, language mediates in two ways: it *refracts* and it *signifies*.

Meanings constructed in language *refract* social reality rather (or more) than they reflect or mirror it. Language is a complex and dynamic system of meaning-making resources. As a consequence, language is inherently polysemic (Volosinov, 1973; Bourdieu, 1991; Fairclough, 1992). Much like a prism refracts daylight in different colors and directions, language has the potential to deploy a diversity of significations about social situations, groups of people, or social relations. There is no one possible meaning for each and every of these but many—something which Laclau and Mouffe have also pointed out, as we have seen. Language is understood as “refracting” not only in the sense that it allows the production of a variety of significations, but also in the sense that this variety is linked to the existence of different enunciative positions—there is no view from no where. These positions are taken up by concrete actors within a field of conflictuality and unequal power relations.

Language is also conceived as a mediation because it *signifies* social reality. Language does not merely refer (Fairclough, 1992:42) to a world that would ‘make sense’ *de facto*, bearing significations that only have to be “dressed in signs” (paraphrasing Foucault, 1984:124) to be made intelligible. Rather, language is a social practice of constructing meaning for this world. Giving this assumption its full weight implies that in ‘signifying the world’ not only do people construct meaning, but construct social reality itself.<sup>12</sup> Both Melucci and Laclau and Mouffe have argued, albeit in different terms, such a symbolic constitution of the social order.

In the same vein, critical discourse analysts contend that constructing meaning for the world is also organizing and ordering this world (Mishler, 1991:105-106; Maingueneau, 1991:196). Text-internal forms and meanings assign and assert asymmetrical positions between language participants. They define categories and classifications schemes, identities and relationships, the



actions and processes that are under the control of the agents or that are done to/imposed on them, delimiting the fields and the objects to which their interaction conventionally applies (Fowler, 1991; Halliday, 1989; Fairclough, 1992). In so 'ordering the world,' actors actively build power structures and power relations through codes of signs (Fowler, 1991; Fairclough, 1992).

The profound heterogeneity and the power dynamics of social life imply that there are always different ways and possibilities to signify. Yet, the power to impose "what is to be counted as real and true" (Yeatman, 1990:155) is unequally distributed among people and groups of people, and only certain significations are given broad legitimacy, and accede to dominance. Language then appears as a meaning-making and reality-creating social practice that is intrinsically non-neutral, and laced with power relations. CD analysts argue that speaking and writing practices not only embed but also *enact* social relations of power.

It is the active *enactment* of linguistic practices—the frequent speaking and writing—that allows categories, identities, relations, processes, etc. constructed in language to be objectified, legitimated, and naturalized as part of the social world (Fowler, 1991:82, 94). The mundane, day-to-day, repetitive practice of language participates in the constant making and remaking of social 'reality' (Fairclough, 1993:139). Linguistic practices play an important role in organizing and sustaining social structure (Fairclough, 1992:58). Language then becomes site and stake in a struggle that aims to unmake and alter the symbolic constructions that embed, enact, and reproduce dominant power relations.

### **'Doing Things' With Language**

Implicated in the making of social reality and its ordering, language is further conceptualized by critical discourse analysts as a mode of action on this reality. To advance our understanding of language-as-action, we need to refer to language use and to struggles involving language not only in terms of contention

among different sets of linguistic practices (of power-laden, text-internal meanings), but as *discursive practices*. Discursive practices—the actual saying or writing of texts by social agents—do not only ‘speak of’ (i.e., express) or enact particular sets of textual meanings. They ‘speak from’ (from a particular position) and they ‘speak to’ (to a particular audience), within institutional and social sites located in space and time: they are *acts of language*. They are events occurring in contexts and doing something in these contexts, with consequences for movement politics, wider socio-political processes, and power relations.

On the one hand, this entails analyzing movements’ texts as strategically produced within specific relational contexts, that is: as attempts to realize certain ends. For example, as Resource Mobilization scholars have aptly noted, for mobilizing people’s participation or institutional support around particular issues. On the other hand, besides the manifest intent, or the action immediately effected by the discursive practice itself, the analyst should consider more broadly what is being accomplished through a particular act of language. The notion of the *performativity* of political speech, as developed by Bourdieu, and a focus on the *actionability* of authorized language help to highlight some other important ways in which political actors “do things with language.”

The conception of the *performativity* of language originates from Speech Acts Theory (Van Dijk, 1985a). In the founding work of Austin (1962), performatives are understood in linguistic terms as utterances that effect what they enunciate through the very act of enunciating (Fowler, 1991:87-88). Moving beyond Austin, French social theorist Bourdieu advocates the grounding of performativity in social and political struggles. Political performatives are “statements which seek to bring about what they state” (Bourdieu, 1991:225). They are utterances that aspire to bring into existence that which they enunciate. Performatives are central elements in the struggle to bring into existence, or force out of existence elements of social reality. These attempts to

institute social reality, or deinstitution what is instituted, are inseparable from struggles "to make and unmake groups," to impose as legitimate a vision or a revision of the divisions of the social world (Bourdieu, 1991:221).

The expression of collective identities by movements, in particular, can be analysed in this light as discursive practices that do a certain number of things. First, the enunciation of movement identities is a performative act that brings into existence the actor of politics—"that who represents." At the same time, these enunciations participate in the creation of the very subject who, it is claimed, "is supposed to be represented" (Hark, 1994:3), as the pronouncement of an identity performatively states the precedence of a specific subject position over many. The enunciation of collective identities by movement actors also works towards de-instituting already instituted categories and the social hierarchies they express and enact. Simultaneously, movements' representations operate to re-institute identity categories "under new terms" (those of a reappropriated, positive identity—Young, 1990:159-161), giving them new saliency. From 'indians' to 'First Nations,' from 'homosexuals' to 'lesbians and gays,' social groups are made and unmade through movement performatives and political actors are established. As a result, the balance of power of the social hierarchies these identities index is *de facto* altered.

By directly linking performatives to political struggle, Bourdieu more explicitly than most theorists of language, shifts the location of the "power of speech" from language to the agents of language. The constitutive properties of language, the effectiveness of performatives (or of any other linguistic feature) are not to be derived from linguistic constructions alone, nor from the sole communication skills of the speakers. Rather, the power of language is a form of delegated power. It is a power bestowed on speech either by the authority of a social institution, or the authority of the group ('those who are represented') which authorizes certain sets of linguistic practices by authorizing itself



to use them (Bourdieu, 1992:109,129).

Another way in which language functions as a mode of action is through its *actionability*. Linguistic practices are indexical of social action. Not only do they point to certain types of actions in given contexts (Lemke, 1990:189), but the social meanings encoded in language are acted upon. This actionability is not a property of language in itself, but a property "authorized" by institutions and groups.

The way identities, relationships and categories of the social are defined in language matters: it makes a difference for the type and direction of people's action—or inaction (Purvis and Hunt, 1993:474; Bourdieu, 1982:127-128). More fundamentally, the war of interpretations in which movements are engaged can be viewed as battles over the power to establish authoritative definitions that imply "acts and interventions" (Fraser, 1989:166). Walker's analysis of the discursive struggle around the issue of wife-battering in Canada is instructive in this regard:

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As "Women's movement activists struggled with professionals for control over the terms in which the issue was to be recognized and acted upon," [...] "the struggle [became] one of contestation over whose knowledge will define the situation, who is to be held to blame, and *what kind of action will be taken by whom.*" (Walker, 1990:18). (my emphasis)

Defining the issue as "domestic dispute" locates the problem within the Criminal Code and the purview of its law enforcement agencies, whereas "family violence" channels intervention within the practices of social work professionals (Walker, 1990:11, 14). By contrast, "wife-battering" refers to Canadian women's groups' struggle for feminist services and for social solutions countering male violence.

If the constitutive character of language is the object of the struggles for the fixation of social meanings in which movements engage, it is not only from the more abstract point of view of



embedding new identities, relations and representations in 'norms and codes,' policies and programs, or in the 'democratic project.' The discursive practices of the actors also generate and enable (Weir, 1993:242)—or conversely, foreclose and preempt—social action. The legitimation, if not the institutionalization, of specific actionable meanings has consequences for the subsequent pursuit of movement politics—as well as for the daily life of people (as the example from Walker also suggests).

### Language As a Bounded Mode of Action

As a social mode of action, language typically operates within parameters that pose limits to the possibilities to signify and to re-signify. The limits placed on 'what can be said' are also limits on 'what can be done' by social agents engaged in social struggle. The bounded nature of linguistic and discursive practices is another important feature of language as a dimension of the exercise of, and struggle over power. Movements' efforts to (re)constitute social reality and to impose new actionable meanings run against and have to break through these limits, or 'effects of closure,' embedded in language-in-use.

A first series of effects of closure are the limits placed on speech before speech can be there, limits that preempt the alternative to be expressed. If, to paraphrase Foucault (1984:127), discourse, or language, is a violence we do to things/to the world, the ways we arrest the flux of social reality potentially also arrest our possibilities of knowing and acting on the world within certain types of patterns. More specifically, these limits take place at the level of the *doxa*. That is, at the level of the classification schemes, categories, relationships, etc., that are the most entrenched in what we call 'common sense.' Widespread and largely accepted, elements of the *doxa* usually go unquestioned (Maingueneau, 1991:247-248; Angenot, 1989:14, 160). Women organization's counter discourse production, with its explicit objective of "changing the mentalities" (Masson and Tremblay, 1993:177), is aimed at the *doxa*. Their speech repositions 'women'

as subjects and agents of non-habitual social processes and in new relationships with the other actors and objects of these processes. These enunciations are attempts to re-open what it is possible to say about women and what it is possible for women to do.

The expression of the unexpressed is also foreclosed by the existing range of meanings socially available to signify the world. Some "ways of being cannot be spoken because the people who live them have no language for them" (Cain, 1994:84), and cannot be acted upon in socially transformative ways until people do have a language for them. A "labour of enunciation" (Bourdieu, 1991:129) has to occur in relation to this emergent speech. Under women's movements efforts, for example, the unease, the shame, the unspeakability of certain social situations have been (re)interpreted and (re)named. The new terms of "sexism," 'sexual harassment,' 'marital, date and acquaintance rape,' 'labor force sex-segregation,' 'the double shift,' and 'wife-battery'" have contributed to remake, Fraser argues, "entire regions of social discourse" (1992:179). Proposing new categories, new meanings to reinterpret the group's experience of the social world, as well as bringing into existence some of the ineffable (Bourdieu, 1991:129), some of the unthinkable (Cain, 1994) components of the experience of lived social relations, movements constitute a new actionable knowledge in the form of new sets of meanings that are made available as basis for political action.

Effects of closure not only operate on 'speech before speech can be there,' but also on the 'speech that is.' *Discourses* limit both linguistic practices (the textual meanings that can be enunciated) and discursive practices as events (whether and how these events can occur). There are two main avenues through which 'discourse' is usually acknowledged as effecting closure. The first one stresses the regularities—or fixations—of meanings in the linguistic practices associated with particular socio-enunciative positions that are also positions in a field of power. In this sense, 'discourse' is usually understood as sets of conventionalized

fixations that bound institutionally positioned speakers to particular ways of signifying. Discourses

define, describe and delimit what it is possible to say and not to say (and by extension—what it is possible to do and not to do) with respect to the area of concern of that institution, whether marginally or centrally. [...]organise and give structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, process is to be talked about. [...]provide descriptions, rules, permissions and prohibitions of social and individual actions. (Kress cited in Yeatman, 1990:164).

Discourses constrain what can be said and what can be done by given institutional actors. Discourses also impose authorized 'ways of talking' about areas of knowledge or social practice on the broader institutional sites where they are hegemonic, and on the other actors wishing to intervene on these sites.

A second way in which discourses effect closure is through what Foucault identifies as their "external conditions of possibility" (1984:127). That is, through the rules of the discursive economies that bound the very enunciation of discourses. By this, Foucault points to the implicit inscriptions of power that make it possible or impossible for particular statements or meaning-making practices to occur at all in, or from, specific institutional positions. In this perspective, he sums up an ensemble of "procedures of exclusion" through which not only the objects of discourse ('what can be talked about'), but also the site, the circumstances and ways of speech, as well the speaking subject her/himself are limited, rarefied, foreclosed.

Women's movement organizations in Canada, for instance, venture since the 1980s on the terrain of economic policy. Their discursive interventions re-encode in gender terms the objects of conventional economic discourse such as free-trade or the deficit. We can see from Brodie's account (1994:30) that women organizations have been denied so far the status of legitimate



speakers on the institutional (state) sites where economic policy is discussed. Their alternative discourse is dismissed and its implications therefore preempted. The respective range of legitimate 'women issues' and of appropriate 'economic issues' remains curtailed as well. The effective closure of this site on the speaker, its speech and the potential actionability of the latter is undeniably an expression and an effect of the exercise of relations of power.

Effects of closure on the speech 'to be' and on the speech 'that is' appear as much an important part of what is at stake in social movements' struggles on the terrain of the symbolic than the meanings themselves. Among the things that oppositional social actors 'do with language' are discursive practices that attempt, and sometimes succeed, in opening up the fields and the sites of meaning-making production, liquefying closure and setting up new parameters for further political action.

## CONCLUSION

The recent interest for the symbolic dimension of collective action, and for its intertwining with questions of strategy and politics is among the most interesting developments in social movement theory today. Yet, as a fair number of scholars have remarked, the field remains ill-equipped to fully appreciate the role played by symbolic constructs in movement activity. It is my contention that the pursuit of this inquiry requires moving away from Resource Mobilizations' understanding of symbolic constructions as simple rhetorical 'tools' in the hands of movement activists and their opponents. The relationship between 'the symbolic' and power is more intimate, and its reaches have further implications in terms of social life and social structure. As underscored by Melucci and explored in a more detailed manner by Laclau and Mouffe, the symbolic is more adequately conceptualized as an intrinsic dimension of the exercise of power, and of the political struggles over the power to constitute social reality.

In this light, a promising avenue for social movement theory



is, I suggest, to engage more extensively with the theorizing (and, eventually, the methodologies<sup>13</sup>) that critical approaches to the study of language and discourse have to offer. This engagement produces a revision of social movement research orientations in particular directions. Namely, it stresses the need for a politically-oriented analysis of movement meaning-making practices that pays attention to the specificity of the language in which movements' meanings and struggles over meanings are couched. This is not promoting the return to a classical, fine-grained analysis of political ideologies. Nor does it amount to considering movements' struggles as a textual "contest between competing tropes"<sup>14</sup> or, in a postmodern fashion, as the disembodied confrontation of contending discourses. Rather, it proposes to understand the ways in which language and discourses are implicated and put to work, as agent-driven modes of action, in political projects of dominance and change.

The action perspective I am arguing for directs the attention towards analysing the linguistic and discursive practices of concrete actors interacting within a political field, and the consequences of these practices for continuity and change within wider social processes. There are two distinct, although related, components to this proposition.

First, it advocates a detailed form-and-meaning analysis of movements' linguistic practices. In this chapter, I have repeatedly made a case for the analysis of the particulars of movements' representations. I have underlined the contingency of movement identities and interests, the variability and ambiguity of movement projects and politics, and the relational and consequential character of frames. If language is, furthermore, theorized as a constitutive, performative and actionable mode of action, then the examination of the linguistic specificity of movement meanings cannot be avoided. What social movement research needs is not so much a "descent into discourse" than a linguistically-sensitive analysis of real instances of people saying and writing things (Fairclough, 1992:57) in the course of collective action.

Second, integral to this proposition is the recognition that text-internal analysis of meanings is not enough. Acts of language occur in specific historical, socio-political, and strategic contexts, and do something in these contexts. Textual meanings have to be located within the "context of situation" (Halliday, 1989) and discursive constraints that bound their production and their enunciation. They must be situated within the political field and the institutional sites where they get played out as the discursive practices of movement actors interacting and struggling with other actors, and examined in their outcomes and consequences in terms of subsequent political, institutional, and social action<sup>15</sup>. In addition, discursive practices have to be inscribed in the socially and historically located strategies and projects of the social subjects that produce them (Maingueneau, 1991). Finally, these practices cannot be treated in isolation from the larger social processes they contribute to realize, or to alter (Threadgold, 1989:103).

Placing the emphasis on a linguistically-sensitive, politically-oriented approach to movements' symbolic production would certainly enable a more in-depth, sharpened analysis of specific discursive struggles over meanings, namings, and framings. More fundamentally, however, and as I have tried to make clear in this article, a focus on the language/power relationship opens new grounds for our understanding of the symbolic challenge of movements, and broadens the scope of our inquiry into the role played by 'the symbolic' in the unfolding of movement politics.

## NOTES

1. This article is the revised version of a chapter to be published in William K. Carroll (ed.) *Organizing Dissent* (2nd ed.). I would like to thank Lorna Weir, Heather Jon Maroney, Bill Carroll, Antje Wiener, and one anonymous referee for their critical and insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

2. For a brief history of RMT's turn towards issues of meaning construction see Donati (1992:136-137), or Benford (1993:197-199). For a more in-depth questioning of the rational choice assumptions at the hearth of

the RM model see McClurg Mueller (1992), and Ferree (1992).

3. The field of sociolinguistics divides into two very different theoretical strands (for an introduction see Van Dijk, 1985a, 1985b). The "Anglo-american" position is influenced by the ethnography of speaking and by micro-interactionist traditions. The "European" (or "Continental") tradition owes more to its engagement with early semiotics, structuralism, Marxism and poststructuralism.

4. The other route indicated by Melucci under the concept of movements' symbolic challenge is the inquiry into the new "ways of life" and "cultural models" developed by oppositional movements. Versions of this line of inquiry have been proposed by Escobar (1992) and Starn (1992).

5. Semiotic systems include linguistic as well as non-linguistic systems of signs (such as dress codes, visual symbols, and non-verbal expressions). For an accessible introduction to social semiotics and the study of semiotic practices, see Lemke (1990).

6. The idea that movement identities, interests, and political projects are the object of a process of political hegemony that occurs "internally," amid the heterogeneous subjects and organizations that compose a movement I derive from Michaud (1992: 212-213).

7. The challenge from poststructuralism and from the non-Western feminist critique has made it impossible to speak of "women," or "women's interests" in universalizing terms. On these questions see in particular Riley (1988), Mohanty (1992), Nicholson (1994), Pringle and Watson (1990).

8. Despite much variation in the use of the term 'discourse' nowadays, this notion, as used by critical discourse analysts as well as in Laclau and Mouffe (1985) is not synonymous with 'language.' Rather, discourses are expressed through linguistic means—this among other mechanisms. Discourses are, more fundamentally, *sets of rules* bounding meaning-making practices, as we will see later in this section.

9. The schools of critical linguistics (Fairclough, 1992; Fowler, 1991), systemic functional grammar (Halliday, 1989; Weir, 1995), social semiotics (Threadgold, 1989), and the French school of discourse analysis (see overview in Maingueneau, 1991), are usually identified with 'critical discourse analysis' (CDA). Reference to earlier theorizing by Bourdieu, and by Foucault (first published in French in the 1970s and 1980s) is a feature of many of these works. For a mapping of CDA's orientations and a brief overview of the different schools, see Van Dijk

(1993:249-251).

10. My use of the term 'text' in these pages is limited to its commonsense acceptation and includes written and spoken linguistic production.

11. On this issue, see note 12.

12. The respective weight of language, or discourse, and of "non-discursive" practices in constituting social reality is currently the object of heated debates. Postmodern attempts to present all-encompassing versions of "discourse" as the source of the social (as, for example, in Laclau and Mouffe's version) are resisted by most critical discourse analysts. Their position rather acknowledges that there is a dynamic, dialectical relationship between non-discursive and discursive practices, between lived existence and what can be captured by language and discourse. On this last point see in particular Cain (1994).

13. An overview of the methodological apparatus available for doing linguistically-based discourse analysis can be found in Maingueneau (1991). Good examples of empirical works using these methods include Fowler (1991), Fairclough (1993), Van Dijk (1993), and Weir (1995).

14. A position attributed by Tarrow to deconstructionists (Tarrow, 1994:119-121).

15. See Walker (1990) for a good example of this type of work.

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# Homophobia in/as Education

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Relationships of power/knowledge are developed and practised through constructions of identity, working on and through the body, with certain attributes privileged and imbued with power, while others are made 'abnormal.' "Normalization" is a dividing practice which compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, and excludes, not only punishing the "bad," but rewarding the "good"; disciplining, rather than repressing. Through normalization, people are disciplined into "proper" gendered and sexualized subjects, that is a "normal" heterosexuality and a "deviant" homosexuality (Foucault, 1979:180; 184; 1978:94). Heterosexuality is constructed as essential, the basis of intersexual relations, and the basis of reproduction and society, although heterosexuality is an achievement of culture, not its precondition (Prentice, 1994:10; Warner, 1993:xxi).

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By subordinating the feminine, and by associating homosexuality with effeminacy (Whyte, 1993:29), heterosexual masculinity is normalized as a dominant power. This subordination is deployed through discursive practices which construct 'truths' about sex, gender, and sexuality as '(un)natural,' '(im)moral,' and '(un)healthy,' and are embodied in 'tradition,' 'history,' 'common sense,' and 'facts.' Homophobia encompasses the dividing practices which subordinate bodies based on sexual orientation, (re)producing a "moral panic" about homo/bisexuality which supports the gender-roles privileging heterosexual males (Dollimore, 1986:9) within modern Canadian society.<sup>1</sup> As education is connected to forms of domination and subordination in society (Apple, 1989:1), my analysis examines whether the

educational institution is a site where normative sexuality is both (re)produced and challenged. If there is no homophobia in education, bi/homosexuality will receive an equivalent representation as heterosexuality in educational practices, and all sexualized students will have similar experiences. If homophobia is used in education, then only certain forms of sexuality will be (re)produced as normative. As part of this wide area of research, this work focuses on the experiences of homosexual males in high school.

The high school level was selected for this study because high school students are at the ages of puberty and dating—ages where sex and sexuality dominate their attention—and because the 1992 study by Masters, Johnson, and Kolodny reported that the most frequent attackers in lesbian-bashing are adolescent males, attributing this violence to a rite of masculinity (Elia, 1993:178). From this it is apparent that for adolescents, homophobia is a component in their understanding of identities.

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Education in Canada is under provincial jurisdiction, and so my analysis focuses on education in Ontario. Using the Ottawa School Board (OBE) as a sample site, it juxtaposes the discourses of official educational policies and curricula (of the Ontario Ministry of Education—hereafter OME—and the OBE) with the lived experiences of (a purposive sample) of seven homo/bisexual high school students from the Ottawa board. The experiences of these students are not solely based on belonging to one subordinated community, but are based on individuals as composites of several fractured identities connected to several groups. In relation to this study, the respondents are subordinate not only as bi/homosexuals but, among other social constructs, as “youth.”

Adolescence is a cultural construction presented as essential: universal and biological, which negates that it changes, if measurements of puberty are considered, depending on periods of history, geography (both national and urban/rural) and class (based on nutrition and work) (Irvine, 1994:7; Mitterauer, 1992:2-5; 12; 32). As the ideology of this society is white and European, so too is that which is defined as “appropriate” gender behaviour



(Monteiro and Fuqua, 1995:163),<sup>2</sup> which further complicates what and who is erased or constructed in sexual education. There is little incentive for students of sexually or “racially” subordinated groups to study a curriculum in which they are not included (Sears, 1995:150; Werner, 1995:130; Dei, 1994:291) or in which hierarchies are constructed, in part, through stereotypes about sexuality (Belyea and Dubinsky, 1994:27), and this is compounded by sex, class, and ability (Ward and Taylor, 1994:51), so that sexual education in schools contributes not only to the construction of youths, but to youths’ embodying the values, if not the characteristics, of the dominant group (Irvine, 1994:7)—including adult and “white.”

Some of the work done in the area of homosexuality and education include that of Hetrick and Martin (1987; 1988), Uribe and Harbeck (1992), and Watney (1991) on anti-homophobic education; Telljohann and Pierce (1993) on student experiences with homophobia in education; Sears (1992) on teacher and guidance councillor education on homo/bisexuality; Whatley (1992) on representations of sexuality in sexual education textbooks. In Canada, Adams (1994), Campey et al. (1994), and Lenskji (1994) have examined the history of sexual education in Ontario and at the Toronto Board of Education; and Frank (1994) and Khayatt (1992) have researched the deployment of sexual education through the experiences of students. Despite these few but important articles, there has been a dearth of sociological research in the area of homophobia in education, particularly in Canada, which my work addresses. My research is unique in focusing on both policies and experiences at the secondary school level in Ontario, and in documenting how students actively mediate the structures and curricula of homophobia in education.

There is no accurate rate of homosexuality because there is no exact definition, means of measurement, or means of sample selection, as surveys recording a wide range in the percentage of homosexuals in the same societies have demonstrated (Hamer

and Copeland, 1994:102; 99). Furthermore, as one can "pass" as heterosexual, the closet ensures that all surveys and censuses will be statistically inaccurate.

This project is not concerned with establishing the normalcy of any sexual orientation through the legitimating power of numbers, or of establishing the "fact" of sexualities as essential. This is, partially, due to my interpretation of democracy as "equal rights for all," regardless of percentage in the population, as opposed to the interpretation of democracy as supporting the "rights of the majority." Consequently, a qualitative, rather than quantitative, methodology has been selected to address my concern with how those who are identified as homosexual, regardless of their frequency in the population, perceive and respond to homophobia. I am also aware of my own subjectivity: in what I hear and focus on and what I ignore; in my relations with the respondents as "researcher"; and in my situation vis à vis the topic.

As the policies around sexualities and homophobia are in flux, only the most recent documents on these issues were studied, in order to explore how they are currently presented. Every recent OME guideline that had any information or discussion on sexual orientation or homophobia was examined, and local newspapers were searched for any announcement from the Ministry of Education on the topic. As provincial jurisdictions overlap with, and respond to, federal policies, attention was also paid to the policies and legislations of other provincial departments and to the federal government. All OBE curricula pertaining to health, sexuality, social issues, physical education, and family studies were studied. Reports and policies of the school board that are available to the public were also studied. My research at the board was supplemented by discussions, mostly by telephone, with teachers, committee members, administrators, and trustees of the Ottawa board.

The population of this study was self-selected, and were obtained through several sources. The majority of respondents

were obtained at the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Youth Group of Pink Triangle Services, a community organization for the lesbian community, although the questionnaire was also distributed at the Ottawa-Carleton Youth Services Bureau, and at lesbian groups at Carleton University, the University of Ottawa, and Algonquin College. As well, an announcement about my study was advertised in the *Algo News*, a periodical for the Ottawa-Carleton lesbian community, in the two summer issues of 1995. My study was also posted on the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual, the Youth, and the Feminist newsgroups on the Internet. No limit was set on the number of respondents, as there was a desire to garner the greatest range of experiences, and because there was a desire to avoid selecting an "authentic" or "representative" voice, which would trap the research in essentialism (Martin, 1988:15).

A formal questionnaire was used to ensure that participants could all respond to the same areas of inquiry, although the questions maintained an open-endedness that allowed individuals to focus or expand on areas that had more relevance for them.

Because this project aimed to record the experiences of bi/homosexuals with homophobia, there was a need to contact both those in and out of the closet. It was assumed that those participants who responded via the lesbian youth groups or the community paper would be those who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, or bisexual—if not, necessarily, at school. To reach those who would not read or appear at a site that would reveal their sexual orientation, the Internet was selected as a research medium.

The results of my present findings are not generalizable. However, if my work corroborates that of other research in this field, it may support arguments for the pervasiveness of homophobia in education, and encourage future study of a more generalizable nature.

Fundamental to this thesis is an understanding of sexuality



and its construction. I have based my understanding on Michel Foucault's works on power/knowledge through anatoma-power and discourse (particularly 1978, 1979, and 1991), and supplemented it in the areas of agency and resistance (Gramsci, 1988; Richer, 1990). Centering on Foucault's concepts of "dividing practices" and "normalization," I have incorporated queer theory into this analysis (Britzman, 1995; Warner, 1993; Sedgwick, 1990). Queer *theories* not only investigate how "normal" is established, but question the concept of "normalcy." They decentre and resist "the regimes of the normal" so as to expand the parameters of knowledge—to make theory queer—and, subsequently, action. Rather than seeing the effects of normalization as the sites of violence, the process of normalization, in itself, is understood to be a form of violence (Warner, 1993:xxvi). Queer theory is not based on sexual orientation or identity politics, nor does it impose a queer (read: lesbian/gay) space within a heteronormative culture, which could only validate a heterosexual dominance or "normalize" a queerness. Queer theory defines itself against the normal, not the heterosexual (Ibid:xxvi), making a space for all identities within a queer culture, queering identity.

Masculinity allocates social roles and spaces based on sex and reproduction (Whyte, 1993:30), and dominates through institutions which are male-defined and male-dominated (Connell, 1993:602). In the [traditionally] homosocial world of male work and war, homosexuality intersects power and gender through homophobia (Sedgwick, 1990:2-3), but this central position of homophobia does not mean that homosexuals have a central position: the importance of homosexuality is proportionate to its negation and marginality (Dollimore, 1986:5).

In the deployment of a heteronormativity, two overlapping and contradictory strategies of homophobia predominate: with one, homosexuality must be denied, silenced, forgotten in the margins; with the other, homosexuality must be acknowledged, discussed, used to enforce and restate the dominant. In regard to



the first strategy, there is the "closet," which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls "the defining structure of gay oppression in this century" (1990:71). The closet is a place for denying sexuality, for the silencing of identity. The closet is always on the margins. However, the closet also signifies the withholding of information and the power which that entails, for ignorance and silence are as powerful as knowledge (Ibid:4), because ignorance is not oppositional to knowledge, but is an effect of knowledge: its limit (Britzman, 1995:154). In the analysis of homophobia in education, the silences must be deconstructed as well as the discourses: What is silenced? How is silence defined? Who is silenced, and is silence the same for the different groups involved? Is sexuality silenced or ignored?

The second strategy involves discussing the "unmentionable." Educational, medical, psychological, and criminal justice, among other institutions, create discourses about sex, making people more aware of it, and inciting more discussion of it (Foucault, 1978:30-31). Discourses need to be unravelled in order to examine how they support one another, and to locate the social institutions that entitle them.

In regard to the discourses and silences on sexual orientation, four guidelines of the Ontario Ministry of Education are salient.

In *Family Studies: Intermediate and Senior Divisions and OAC*, 1987, "diversity" is mentioned in the "Definition of Family Studies," yet homosexuality is omitted in the examples of diversity, in the units on parenting, and in the units on "Families in Canadian Society" (OME, 1987a:4-5; 62-66; 90-100).

The manual on *Education about AIDS*, 1987, represents homosexuals as closeted, deceitful, isolated, incapable of maintaining relationships, and as a threat to heterosexuals (OME, 1987b:C37; D30).

The *Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation*, 1993, acknowledges that racism is compounded by discriminations

towards gender, disabilities, and sexual orientation, and may be applied both directly and systematically (OME, 1993:5; 42-43). It recognizes that homosexuals may be a target of violence yet, unlike their policies towards race, gender, and disabilities, it does not try to rectify the causes of homophobia.

The recent *Violence-Free Schools Policy*, 1994, comes closest to rectifying the problems of systematic homophobia. In it, the Ministry states that discrimination, including homophobia, is unacceptable, and that school boards must state this in their Code of Behaviour; that the curriculum "must be free of bias and must reflect the diverse groups that compose society" (OME, 1994:18-19). Schools and school boards, according to this document, must report violent or hate-motivated incidents to the police (Ibid:20). This appears as an excellent initial step. However, "must" and "should" are not used interchangeably, and attention should be paid to the selection of these words.

Homophobia *is not* to be tolerated, and violent incidents *must* be reported, but school boards *should* address the causes of homophobia, *should* find links within the community, and *should* provide the staff and administration with the knowledge and skills required to identify and eliminate discrimination based on sexual orientation (Ibid:18; 20-22). "Should" does not require school boards that are homophobic to remove the systematic element of their violence, only to respond to direct violence.

These policies and guidelines are mediated by the Ottawa Board of Education in one of their policy manuals, two curricula units, and one report.

In *Towards a Healthy Sexuality, Grade 10: A Sexuality Unit for Grade Ten Students*, 1990, homosexuality and bisexuality are only discussed as "high risk groups" for AIDS (OBE, 1990:36).

In *Health Education Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10*, 1982, homosexuality is only in the unit on "Psychological and Physiological Changes at Puberty," where it is pathologized and seen as a "phase," and a more detailed discussion of homosexuality is omitted because it is not yet completely understood. The guide-

line assumes that they know everything about heterosexuality, that all the students are heterosexuals, and that tolerance, not equality, is required. In the remainder of the curriculum, love and dating are discussed only in reference to heterosexuals (OBE, 1982). Homosexuals have sex; heterosexuals share love.

As with the Ministry guidelines, homosexuality is discussed exclusively in the "Health" and "Family Studies" curricula. By erasure, it is the silenced subject of the other areas of education.

Code 930, the Board's "Anti-Racism and Ethno-Cultural Equity Policy," is based on the Ministry guideline. In it, they replace the Ministry's term "sexual orientation" with "lifestyle" (OBE, 1993:2).

Finally, *The Report No. 94-110 from the Administration to the Ottawa Board of Education, Re: Programs, Policies, and Curriculum that Address Issues of Homophobia and Sexual Orientation* was written in 1994 as a response to reports and inquiries by several groups about homophobia in the schools and the high risk of suicide among homosexual teenagers (OBE, 1994:1-2). After studying the issues, it recommended that the curricula does not need to be changed, and that only staff development programs dealing with sexuality should be initiated (Ibid:2-5).

Notwithstanding official policies against homophobia, all the respondents in my study perceived their high schools as homophobic. Two respondents came "out" only after graduating; one respondent changed schools frequently, in order to prevent his sexuality from becoming known; another dropped out of school because of the "constant stress" caused by homophobic students.

Homophobia was experienced verbally, through comments by students and, occasionally, by teachers, and through the silences by teachers and administrators regarding reports of homophobia. It was experienced physically, in attacks—or in witnessing other students attacked, which reinforced their fears of coming out; and through graffiti and vandalism. It was also

experienced through the internalization of stereotypes about deviants; through the fear that coming out would result in violence and ostracism; and through the belief that they were "the only one" in their school. All seven respondents admitted that, at some point in their high school life, they acted homophobic as a way to appear heterosexual.

Although homophobic attacks must be reported to the police, the Ottawa police have received only one report of homophobia from the region's high schools (Ottawa Bias Crimes Unit; 1995). The discrepancy between the examples of homophobia reported by the respondents and the dearth of incidents reported to the police may have to do with who creates the discourse and defines an action as homophobic. One of the respondents reported that homophobic incidents in his school are "swept under the rug," while another reported that homophobic violence would be considered as "just a violence problem, not connected to anything."

110 None of the respondents were aware of the Ministry policy. The fact that these students are unaware that they are protected exemplifies how official discourses can be silenced for the benefit of the dominant.

Sexuality is officially included in only two subjects of the high school curricula, it was not always discussed in those classes whereas it appeared in other areas of education. Four of the respondents claimed that homosexuality was included in the Health component of their Physical Education classes, but all claimed that it was quickly dismissed or joked about by the teachers. In "Family Studies," homosexuality was discussed, not because it was in the curriculum, but because of the recent media attention on same-sex legislation, or because lesbian/gay students in the classes instigated discussions or requested information on the topic. Four respondents mentioned homosexuality being discussed in English classes. This may reflect the attitudes of the individual teachers, as homosexuality is not a required element of any English curriculum. Other subjects where respondents claimed



homosexuality was mentioned were: drama, geography, and science, and law. The inclusion of homosexuality, for the majority of these students, was by their own initiative, through using the flexibility of "independent study" projects to introduce lesbian topics and issues into the curricula.

Sexuality is also taught, unofficially, through the assumption that the teachers are role-models. Teachers announce and promote their heteronormativity through wedding rings and asides about their personal lives. Respondents were asked if they knew any teacher(s) at their school who were out. Only two respondents knew teachers who were open about their homosexuality. However, four respondents claimed they discovered teachers in bars or at lesbian events, or found out about teachers after they graduated. The students felt this reinforced homophobia: that closeted teachers promoted a shameful identity.<sup>3</sup>

Many of the respondents found strategies to resist homophobia. There was active resistance, such as reporting homophobia to the administration and to the local media, introducing lesbian content into their work, attending school dances in same-sex couples, wearing "gay pride" clothing and insignias; and there was passive resistance, such as not declaring one's sexuality, or changing schools. Resistance was both individual, such as those who, as the only person out in their school, hoped to be role-models for other students; and collective, such as attempting to form lesbian groups within the schools. Resistance often took several forms simultaneously, even when contradictory.

To conclude, homophobia is deployed through the erasure of homosexuality from the bulk of the curricula; from the assumption that teachers and students are heterosexual; through the discourses of the abnormal and the pathological; in the structures of an institution that do not provide job protection or spousal benefits for homosexual teachers. Homophobia is in policies that allow a lack of resources and expertise to justify inaction; that prohibit homophobic violence with "musts," but tolerate it with

"shoulds." It is counted in the police reports on homophobia in the high schools (one), and these pages of daily encounters. It is heard in the differences between the official pronouncements of "tolerance," "diversity," and "violence-free schools," and the lived experiences of homosexual students who are peripheralized, disciplined, erased, and taught to stay, silenced, within the closets.

Homophobia is resisted by those students who refuse the closets and their silencing. Each of the seven students interviewed had created a space of resistance, figuratively and literally. Resistance also comes from teachers who come out to their students, and in teachers and administrators, both lesbian and straight, who create spaces for lesbian-positive components in their curricula, and who challenge homophobia.

While official policies may claim to promote the diversity of students and to combat homophobia, they continue to represent homosexuals as the problem which is solved, not through diversity, but through normalization, or erasure.

## NOTES

1. The term "homosexual" is the prevalent term used in this study as it is the most frequent term used in the "official" discourses. Its use draws attention to the scientific typologies which instill "truth" into bodies. "Lesbian", "gay", and "bisexual" (and their collective abbreviation as "lesbigay") will refer to homosexuals and bisexuals who identify themselves as "out" and as part of homo/bisexual communities.
2. This compounds "race" with sex, as Western culture's mind/body dualism attributes mind, reason, and civilization with men; and body, emotion, and nature with women (Prentice, 1994:5).
3. Teachers at the OBE are not protected against discrimination based on "sexual orientation" in their policy manual (OBE, 1985:1)), nor are they protected by their union (telephone interview, union representative, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, November, 1994).

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# Please, Bears Don't Talk! The Smokey Bear Performance Rules<sup>1</sup>

*Joe Hermer  
Carleton University*

If you go down to the woods today  
You're in For a Big Surprise

If you go down to the woods today  
You'd Better go in Disguise  
- The Teddy Bear Pic-Nic Song

I

In an age of widespread environmental destruction and toxification, how is the 'official' version of nature constructed within the boundaries of North American recreational parks? To ask this question is also to struggle with a remarkable paradox: that the very parks where we try to 'get back to nature,' the very places where we look to experience a permissive freedom from the regimen of urban life, are some of the most harshly regulated, intensely ordered spaces in the public sphere, a paradox expressed in the apparent oxymoron of a *regulated wilderness*. For it seems increasingly true that the regulated wilderness of North American parks is representative of the very oppressive features of urban life from which people, quite ironically, look to parks as an escape.

In this brief paper, I would like to specifically examine one well known agent of the moral order of park governance, Smokey Bear. However, let me first provide a thumbnail sketch of the larger research effort from which I have drawn Smokey as such a vivid example.

As a contribution to the sociology of governance,<sup>2</sup> my

research efforts examine how competing regulatory regimes work to constitute and police the moral order of the public sphere. A major branch of this project is an examination of the governance texts of major park jurisdictions in North America.

Park governance texts consist of park legislation, field and standing orders, officer training guidelines, public relations material, occurrence, injury and fatality statistics and descriptions. These governance texts constitute the political-juridical intent to govern park jurisdictions. In examining these texts, I am interested in the textual constructions that constitute the discursive intent of park institutions, and the possibilities of *ordering* that this intent generates.

Also, let me be clear about what I mean by *park*, a difficult little word to conceptualize. When I talk about a park, I am generally referring to an outdoor landscape open to the public for both day and night visitation (i.e. camping), in the charge of formal provincial or state government under a dual mandate of both preservation and recreation of natural and cultural resources.

I begin by providing a brief historical account of Smokey Bear, which I have drawn from Stephen Pyne's (1982) wonderful social history, *Fire In America*.

## II

In July, 1942, United States Secretary of Agriculture Claude R. Rickard announced in a radio broadcast that

the control and prevention of forest fires is a first line defense job on the home front...We cannot forget...that the British Royal Air Force found it worthwhile to start great fires in the forests of Germany. Every fire in our fields or forests this year is an enemy fire. (cited in Pyne, 1982:176)

While the connection between forest fire prevention and national defense had for some time become popular in the public mindset

with slogans such as “Careless Matches Aid the Axis” and “Your Match, Their Secret Weapon,” this moral campaign lacked its own unique symbol (Pyne, 1982:176). In 1944 the Wartime Ad Council and The Co-Operative Forest Fire Prevention Campaign, with the help of an advertising consultant, came up with the idea of using a bear, after considering other animals, including squirrels and monkeys (Pyne, 1982:176). The artist contracted to create Smokey was instructed by forest service and war council bureaucrats that this bear should wear “a campaign hat,” should have “an appealing expression” with “a knowledgable but quiz-zical look” and should not look like “the bear that symbolized Russia” (Pyne, 1982:176). The first poster of this uniformed bear was issued in 1945, named after a famous new york city fireman, “Smokey Joe” Martin (Pyne, 1982:176). However, it was in 1950 when a real bear became the ultimate referent for the poster: an abandoned bear cub, saved by a ranger from a forest fire, became “Little Smokey” and was delivered into legendhood to Washington National Zoo (Pyne, 1982:177). At the height of his popularity in the mid 1960s, Smokey was polled as being the most recognizable figure in American life, and the *Smokey Bear Act* was passed by congress to protect him from “commercial exploitation” (Pyne, 1982:177). Despite efforts at providing the famous caged bear with a mate named Goldie, Smokey left no offspring and died in zoo captivity in 1977 (Pyne, 1982:177). By then, Smokey had become one of the most popular exports of American consumer culture, where his persona was exported to Canada, Mexico and Turkey. Smokey was even introduced by missionaries to the jungle of the Belgian Congo, where children were reported by a Forest Service Publication to be “intensely interested in the bear that wore a hat and wondered if all animals in America wore hats” (Pyne, 1982:179-180).

### III

What role does this American symbol of patriotism and moral fortitude currently play in the regulation of North American park

space? Every summer Smokey Bear costumes are dispatched in crates across North America to parks to be animated in "visitor service" and "nature interpretation" programs. And it is this contemporary presence of Smokey which I would like to turn our attention to by examining the most notable governance text "Guidelines For The Use of the Smokey Costume" (Ministry of Natural Resources [MNR], 1994) a list of rules that accompanied the Smokey Bear costume on his tour through Ontario Provincial Parks in the summer of 1994. These "Smokey Bear rules" which park staff are expected to follow when suited up in the Smokey costume, nicely illustrate the important distinction made by H.L.A. Hart between primary and secondary rules, between rules that order regulatory objects, and rules that regulate the agents of regulation (Hart, 1961).

The secondary "Smokey rules" have three main prescriptive themes: to regulate the character of the person wearing the costume; to order the performance that Smokey carries out; and to prescribe the role of an assistant present to maintain this performance.

The wearer of the Smokey costume, who should "be tall" (MNR, 1994:2) is expected to behave in a manner that does not soil the image of Smokey. The wearer is warned, apparently without irony, of "no alcohol or cigarettes during Smokey performances" (MNR, 1994:3). The rules go on to suggest that Smokey should "Be alive, [v]igorous, alert and remember, you are presenting one of the greatest of all symbols. You are a celebrity, a star. Act like one, don't destroy the image" (MNR, 1994:3).

The rules then move to prescribe how Smokey should perform as a forest fire prevention celebrity. Smokey's entrance should be in full costume—no half dressed bears are allowed—and is warned not to "appear before your cue" (MNR, 1994:2), a perfect reminder of the dramaturgical nature of Smokey's presentation. The wearer should "know the route you are going to take so Smokey looks alert, not lost," and he should move



about “carefully as not to upset children” (MNR, 1994:3). Smokey is urged not to “stand with your hands at your side” but rather “hold them up and move them about. [w]ave to people” (MNR, 1994:3). In a tone that suggests the wearer might somehow be losing his human sense, the rule writer suggests that “[a] handshake is a useful device for activity” (MNR, 1994:3).

With the character of the wearer secure, and his movements prescribed, the role of an assistant is emphasized. Smokey should always be accompanied by an assistant, one that will “let Smokey lead” and “keep crowds from him...they tend to maul his suit.” In a regulated wilderness it is the friendly bear who is in danger of being mauled (MNR, 1994:2). Most importantly, “an assistant should do all the talking. It is best to keep Smokey silent. This helps prevent him from saying anything “dumb” and preserves his image as a bear. Bears don’t talk” (MNR, 1994:2).

#### IV

This anthropomorphic performance constructs Smokey with an unassailable moral character, which is made even more admirable in the figure of a civilized bear. He is the perfect authority to communicate the risk of both human and non-human worlds: he is rendered inhuman by his inability to speak; rendered unwild by his adoption of the niceties of human interaction. Smokey is an epitome of moderation, he is punctual, polite, nicely groomed, good with children: a picture of self control and personal responsibility. In fact, one could hardly think of a more offensive figure than the anti-image of these secondary rules: a rude, slothful, badly dressed bear, drinking and smoking, stumbling lost without human assistance, scaring children with his attempt at human speech.

Smokey’s character, which is used to invoke the dangers of carelessness, promotes a central characteristic of park order: the promotion of self-regulation. Self-regulation utilizes a shifting public/private distinction that makes possible “action at a distance” where regulatory agents can make “the absent present”

(Latour, 1986).<sup>3</sup> The promotion of self governance is vividly illustrated in Smokey's slogan, which dates back to 1947, "Remember, ONLY YOU can prevent forest fires," which was often accompanied by a picture of Smokey standing against a shovel, pointing Uncle Sam like at the implied reader. Smokey's slogan is strikingly similar to another warning central to the regulation of leisure, "Only You can stop drinking and driving." And like discourses of alcohol regulation, fire itself is removed from embodying the object of regulation: Smokey is not so much concerned with actually regulating fire as he is in ordering the behaviour of people, just as impaired driving crusaders focus on the evil character of the drunk driver.<sup>4</sup>

This environment of self-regulation, communicated through the stoic character of Smokey, promotes a climate of surveillance where individuals are encouraged to self-police themselves as well as the 'strangers' around them. This risk based surveillance is most vividly expressed in the presence of neighbourhood watch type programs which are popular in many parks. Often, "park watch" programs utilize their own animal mascots, some of whom look like they could have been rejects from the original smokey campaign; for example, Maryland state parks utilizes "McGruff The Crime Dog" to encourage visitors to participate in "park watch" and "take a more active role in protecting personal property and preserving the park" (undated, Maryland Forest, Park and Wildlife Service). The dual emphasis here that invokes both environmental preservation and personal protection is especially notable in park jurisdictions: the binding together of personal and environmental risk, where one works both to secure the self and save the environment, provides for a powerful moral emphasis.

## V

While Smokey was one of the most successful symbols to have emerged out of the propaganda rooms of World War Two, he can be seen today as a more subtle agent of another moral campaign

of industrial North America: the ordering and manufacturing of the experience of nature and wilderness. The character of Smokey, animated through public appearances ordered by secondary rules, promotes a surveillance based environment of risk that creates a self-regulating landscape of moral purity. Smokey performances are a vivid contribution to the order of the regulated wilderness that represents nature as a perfectly ordered, sanitized landscape where risk is constantly evoked through moralizing discourses of self-regulation. Indeed, as a civilized "celebrity" of the wilderness, Smokey stands as a disturbing image of a degraded, emasculated 'dancing bear' of late industrial society, ordered to perform for park tourists, subjected to an image of nature congruent with the values of consumerism and practises of environmental exploitation.

## NOTES

1. As adapted from a presentation at the Graduate Student Work In Progress Seminar, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, October 26, 1995.

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2. For an introduction to the sociology of governance see Hunt and Wickham (1994).

3. The governance technology of "action at a distance" is exemplified in the use of "Official Graffiti" (Hermer and Hunt, 1996) such as the "No Loitering" or "Stay on The Path" signs. Such explicit inscriptions evoke absent experts and officials and construct regulatory targets as self-regulating objects who are at risk.

4. The emphasis on forest fire prevention that Smokey promotes in park settings is strongly overstated. Recreationalists cause relatively few fires, and the ones they do ignite burn relatively little area—lightening strikes are the main culprit of forest fires. For example, between 1978 and 1987, in all provinces, recreationalists (both park and non-park) were reported to have caused 17% of all fires, which accounted for 2% of the total areas burned (see Higgins and Ramsey (1991:9)).

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